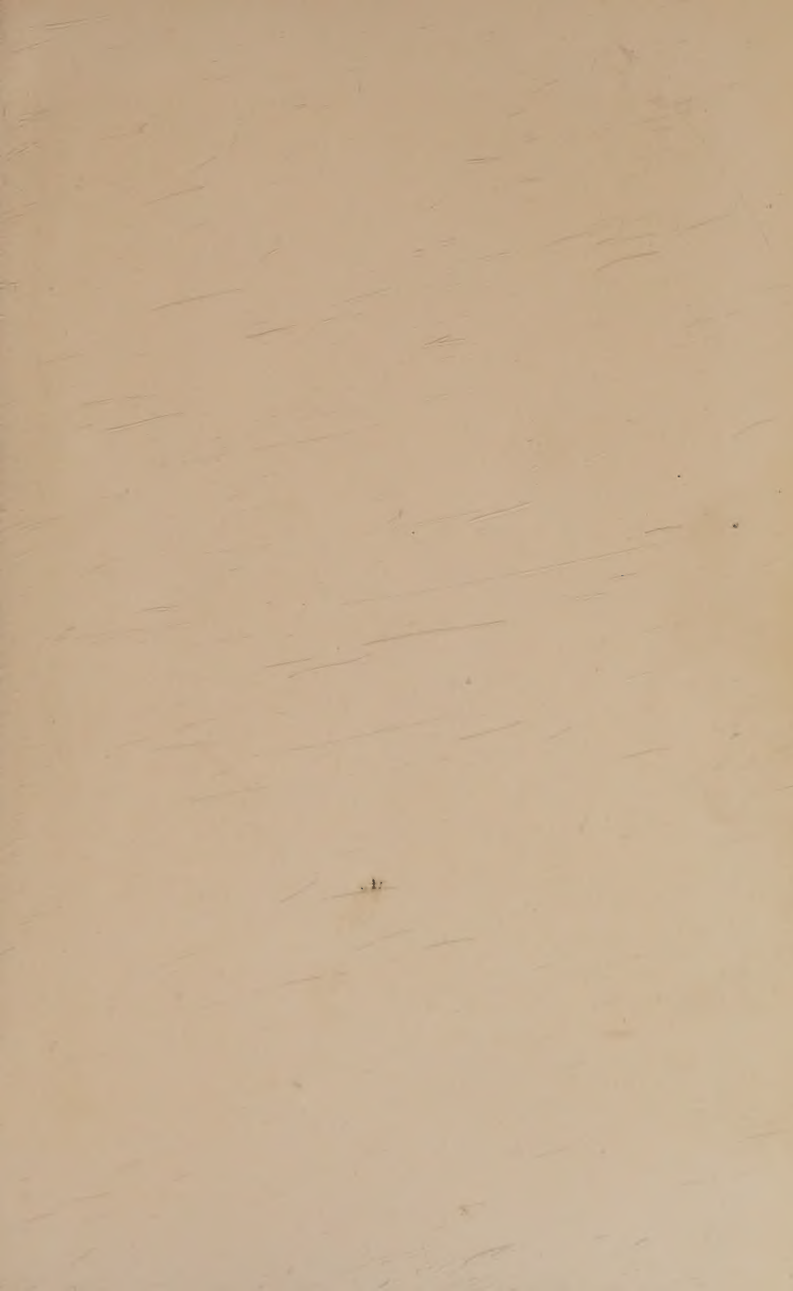


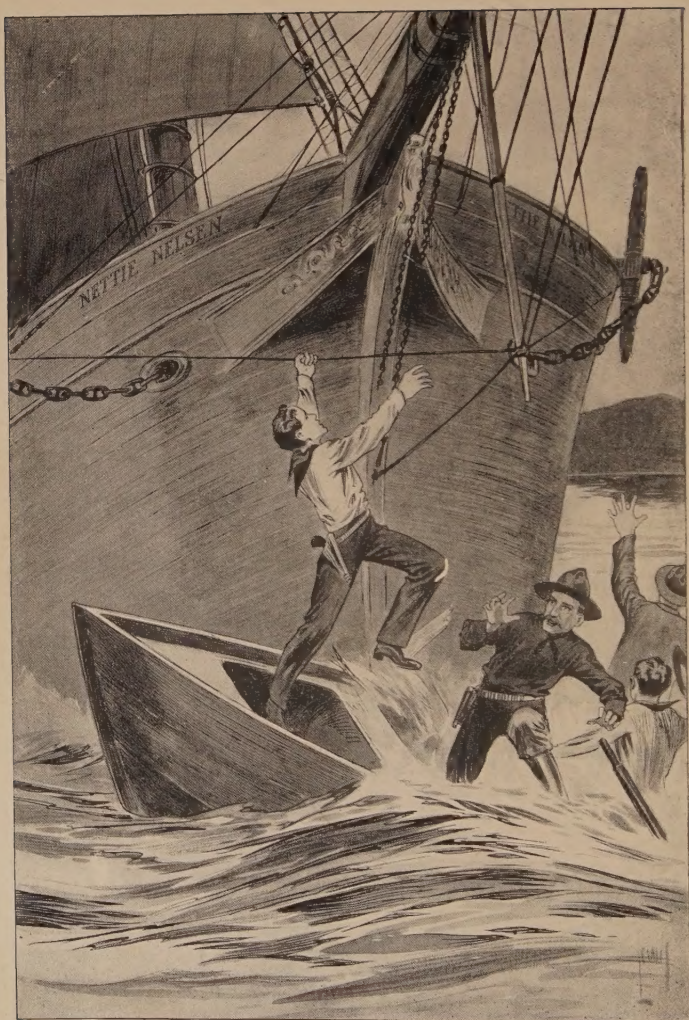
The
MOTOR RANGERS
ON BLUE WATER
MARVIN WEST





23





BUT BEFORE HE COULD UTTER ANOTHER WORD, THERE WAS
A TERRIFIC SHOCK.

—Page 59.

THE
MOTOR RANGERS
ON BLUE WATER
Or
THE SECRET OF THE DERELICT

BY
MARVIN WEST

AUTHOR OF "THE MOTOR RANGERS' LOST MINE," "THE MOTOR
RANGERS THROUGH THE SIERRAS," ETC., ETC.

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THE MOTOR RANGERS ON BLUE WATER

CHAPTER I.

THE WATCHER OF THE TRAIL.

A party of horsemen, riding in single file, was making its way down the steep, rugged trail leading from the interior to Santa Inez. Although they had not as yet glimpsed the little mission town, which was their destination, the blue, sparkling glint of the Pacific had, for some time, been visible through the columnar trunks and dark foliage of the red woods.

The four persons composing the little cavalcade seemed to be in the best of spirits as their sure-footed cayuses ambled along. Their voices rose high amid the hush of the densely wooded slopes.

Squirrels, blue-jays, and other denizens of the Coast Range, fled incontinently as they heard the high, boyish tones intruding into their domains.

But they need not have been afraid. Fond as the Motor Rangers, all three, were of exercising their "twenty-twos" on any "small deer" that came in sight, their minds, just then, were far too much occupied to think of hunting.

"See the boat yet, Nat?" inquired Joe Hartley, a stalwart, sun-bronzed lad of about seventeen. He addressed a boy of about his own age, who rode slightly in advance of the rest. Like Joe, Nat Trevor was attired in typical mountaineer's costume, set off by a jaunty sombrero with a leather band round the crown.

Nat turned in his saddle.

"I could hardly sight her yet, Joe," he rejoined. "But she'll be there on time. Captain Akers would not disappoint me, I know."

"Y-y-y-you've go-go-got acres of f-f-f-faith in him, so to speak," came from the third young rider in line, Ding-dong—otherwise William,—Bell, of course.

Nat shook his quirt at the stuttering lad with mock anger.

"If you don't stop your everlasting punning, Ding-dong, I'll—I'll——"

"Have ter leave him behind. I reckon that would be the worst punishment for him," struck in a loosely built, bronzed man, who rode behind Ding-dong and sat his horse with the easy grace of the practised rider. His leather "chaps," blue shirt, and red handkerchief, carelessly knotted about his sun-burned throat, also proclaimed him a typical westerner of the Sierran region. And so he was, for most of our readers will by this time have recognized in him Cal Gifford, the former driver of the Lariat stage, who had so materially aided our young Motor Rangers in their adventures in the wild region which now lay behind them. All of these stirring incidents were related in a previous volume of this series, "The Motor Rangers Through the Sierras."

By a hair rope, which was "half-hitched" round the horn of his saddle, Cal led an ex-

ceedingly small burro, with sagely flapping ears. The animal bore a big canvas pack, which, besides containing the provisions of the party on their dash from the mountains to the coast, carried also the object of their expedition—namely, the box of sapphires found in the dead miner's—Elias Gooddale's—cabin.

On the return of the boys to Big Oak Flat from their Sierran excursion they had found themselves facing the problem of the safe conveyance of the precious stones to a community of law and order where they might be placed in the proper hands till Elias Gooddale's heirs could be found.

But, as will be recalled by the readers of "The Motor Rangers Through the Sierras," Colonel Morello's band was still at large, and it had been decided that as the outlaws already knew of the existence of the sapphires, and the identity of their custodians, that it would be dangerous to attempt to transport such a valuable freightage through the lonely mountains by automobile.

The car, therefore, had been left in charge of

Herr Muller to take through to Santa Barbara. The boys, for their part, adopted with all enthusiasm Nat's plan, which was to tell Captain Akers to bring Nat's motor boat "Nomad" from Santa Barbara and meet them on the coast at Santa Inez, an old mission town with a passable harbor. It was agreed that transportation of the sapphires in this way would offer few difficulties and no dangers, and as Herr Muller politely but firmly declined to go a-cruising, the boys were relieved of the task of finding some one to take their fine touring car through to their home town.

As for the "Nomad," she was a sixty-foot cruising motor boat of thirty horse-power. Nat and his chums had seen her keel laid before they set out for the Sierran trip, and when the question of moving the sapphires came up, as has been said, Nat at once hit on the idea of combining business and pleasure by sending word to her builder, Captain Akers, to bring her up to Santa Inez. Thus they would experience the delights

of a trial trip and at the same time feel that the sapphires were safe and sound.

Lest it be wondered at that a lad of Nat's age could own such a fine craft, we must refer our new readers to the first volume of this series, "The Motor Rangers' Lost Mine." In this book it was told how Nat and his chums routed some rascals in Lower California, and how Nat came into his own. Inasmuch as his chums had also, by his generosity, been made sharers in his good fortune, none of the boys was short of pocket money. In fact, had they not all three been steady-going, well-balanced lads it might have been said they had too much.

But the Motor Rangers, instead of expending their money foolishly, preferred to lay it out in healthy, exciting expeditions, and that they had already been recompensed by a goodly share of adventures we know. Possibly a word further in relation to the sapphires they were transporting may not be amiss.

The gems, then—which were all in the rough—had been found by Nat and his chums in what

had at first appeared an abandoned hut in the Sierras. On investigating the place, however, they discovered the body of the former occupant of the hut, a miner named Elias Gooddale. He had evidently succumbed to the rigors of the preceding Sierran winter. Although everything else in the hut had been pretty well devoured by mountain rats, a tin despatch box had escaped mutilation. Opening this the lads found papers therein, telling of the hiding place of some sapphires under the hearthstone. Gooddale, with a dying effort, had also penned a will, leaving the gems to his unnamed next of kin. It was recalled by Cal Gifford that Gooddale had come to the community some years before and had engaged on a quest for sapphires. He was adjudged crazy by the other miners, but he kept steadily on his strange hunt. Judging by the boys' find, it appeared that death must have overtaken him in the very moment of victory.

However that may have been, it so happened that while the party was examining its strange find a face appeared at the window. It was the

countenance of Ed. Dayton, one of Col. Morello's principal lieutenants. The boys had had trouble with him in Lower California—as related in "The Motor Rangers' Lost Mine"—and he had had no reason to love them. As ill luck would have it, he saw the sapphires as they were spread out before the finders' wondering eyes.

The sequel was the pursuit of the Motor Rangers by Col. Morello and his band, whose cupidity had been excited by the rich discovery. The outlaws surrounded the boys and their friends in a hut in a canyon and escape seemed to be impossible. But Nat, by a bit of clever strategy, managed to slip out, and after a wild ride through an abandoned lumber flume reached Big Oak Flat. A posse was formed and arrived in time to rescue Cal Gifford and the rest. But Morello and his band escaped, only one or two minor members of the rascally organization being wounded in the battle that followed the arrival of the posse.

Leaving the sapphires in the care of Sheriff Jack Tebbetts, of Big Oak Flat, the boys and

their party continued their motoring trip through the mountains. At its conclusion they returned to the primitive settlement only to hear that Mor-ello had been committing fresh depredations. Sheriff Tebbetts strongly advised against the gems being carried through the mountains by auto on that account. Thus it came about that our party came to be riding to the little coast town of Santa Inez, the trail to which laid through comparatively settled, orderly country.

But we have deserted our friends altogether too long while we have taken this lengthy but necessary digression. Let us now return and accompany them as they round a turn in the trail and find themselves zigzagging down the mountainside in full view of Santa Inez and the glorious Pacific.

"What a queer little town!" exclaimed Nat, as the panorama below suddenly burst upon them.

He gazed in an interested way at the collection of red-tiled roofs and adobe walls below them. Several modern cottages mingled with the ancient Spanish architecture without detract-

ing a bit from its quaintness. Above the other roofs, and some little distance removed from them, imposed a tower pierced with numerous openings, within which swung ancient bells. This was the tower of the old mission of Santa Inez. It had been long abandoned, but still remained a pathetic monument to a great religious movement.

Situated as it was, at the foot of the mountainside, which was clothed with pungent bay and madrone trees, and facing a blue bay of horse-shoe shape, a more picturesque little place it would be hard to imagine.

"But the boat?" exclaimed Joe, as they advanced down the steeply pitched trail. "I don't see a sign of her."

It was true. The sparkling, deep blue bay was empty of life. That is, if a fair-sized black schooner, which lay at some little distance offshore, be excepted.

All the party showed their disappointment. They had confidently expected to behold the trim outlines of Nat's "Nomad" as soon as they came

in full view of Santa Inez. Blank looks were exchanged. Even Cal, who had had no experience of the sea and indeed rather mistrusted it, looked downcast.

"Maybe a whale swallowed yer ship, Nat," he ventured.

In spite of his chagrin over the non-arrival of the "Nomad," Nat had to laugh, for Cal had made the remark just recorded in no joking sense. The mountaineer, who had hitherto obtained only distant glimpses of the ocean, fully believed it was inhabited by monsters capable of devouring whole vessels.

"There are some big whales in the Pacific, all right, Cal," said the boy, shoving back his sombrero, "but I hardly think that any one has yet heard of one capable of absorbing a sixty-foot motor boat. And—hullo—what's that? Hur-ray!"

His cheer was speedily echoed by the others who had fixed their eyes on him when he broke off so excitedly in the middle of a sentence.

Coming round the southern point of the horse-

shoe-shaped bay was a trim and trig white craft with one slender mast, but no funnel. She was coming swiftly, too. The white foam at her bow showed how she was cutting through the water.

“‘Nomad,’ ahoy!” shouted Nat, standing erect in his stirrups and waving his sombrero, utterly oblivious of the fact that at that distance it would have been quite impossible to have seen, much less heard, him.

The others caught his enthusiasm. Indeed the “Nomad” was a sight to make the veriest landsman wax enthusiastic. As she cut round the point and neared the land they could catch the glint of polished brass and wood work when she rolled to the Pacific swell.

Presently the lone figure on her bridge could be seen to issue an order to another man, who was on the forward part of the little motor craft. There was a splash at the “Nomad’s” bow, and she came to a standstill.

“Anchored!” cried Nat.

At the same instant the figure they had de-

scried on the bridge was seen running aft. In a moment, from the jack-staff astern, appeared something that made all their hearts beat a bit faster—Old Glory! The land breeze caught the flag's folds and whipped them out splendidly.

"Well, boys, there's the gallant little craft that will take us all safe to Santa Barbara and give us many a jolly cruise beside!" cried Nat, a note of exultation in his voice.

"Our dream ship!" cried Joe poetically.

"Our ter-ter-ter-treasure ship you mean," sputtered Ding-dong. "She'll get the sapphires safely through and Morello can hang about all he wants to, waiting for us to show up in the good old automobile."

"Yep, I reckon we've fooled the old coyote this trip, smart as he is," chuckled Cal, leaning over to adjust a stirrup leather.

As he did so, from the brush which grew close up to the trail on either side, there came a sharp snap—a breaking branch evidently.

In the silence that had followed the former stage driver's remark, the sudden noise sounded

as loud and as startling as a pistol shot. Cal straightened up instantly. But quick as he was, whoever or whatever had caused the sudden noise did not further reveal their presence. The boys searched about for a bit, but their investigation was only perfunctory, for they were too eager to get on board the "Nomad" to spend much time at anything else.

"Guess it must have been a deer, or a rabbit, or something," said Nat, as they remounted and set off once more.

The others agreed, and thought no more of the matter. But Cal belonged to a school that finds cause for suspicion in any unexplained noise. It is an instinct descended to such men from the harassed pioneers of the Pacific Slope.

He frowned to himself as they rode forward, although he said nothing to the lads of what was passing in his mind. But to himself he muttered seriously enough:

"That warn't no rabbit, nor it warn't no deer. Critters don't bust branches; they're too wise. *That was a man.*"

CHAPTER II.

COLONEL MORELLO CHARTERS A SCHOONER.

Cal Gifford had been correct in his guess. The watcher of the trail was a man, and probably the last man in the world the boys would have wished to have in their vicinity just then. For it was Ed. Dayton who had stepped upon the branch, much to his chagrin, for the accident came just at the very moment that he was pretty sure of overhearing something interesting, provided he remained silent.

Dayton had been rabbit hunting along the trail when his quick ear had caught the sound of the approaching party. With an instinct entirely natural to a man of his character he had hastened to conceal himself immediately. This was partly, as has been said, by instinct, and partly from a reasonable sense of prudence; for Ed. Dayton knew as well as any one else that a re-

ward had been offered for the capture of any of the leaders of Morello's gang, and he was naturally wary of encountering strangers of any kind.

He had never dreamed that the boys were in that part of the country, and his astonishment at recognizing their voices first, and then their faces as he peered through the bushes, was colossal. The former chauffeur was as quick of wit as he was lacking in principle, and it had not needed more than Ding-dong's stuttered hint about the "treasure ship" to apprise him that he had by, for him, a lucky accident stumbled once more across the trail of the sapphires.

When the branch had cracked, Dayton, knowing that a search might ensue, had thrown himself flat on his stomach and wiggled off across the ground at a surprising rate. By the time the boys had remounted and continued their journey he had been some distance off, and far on his way to his destination. This was a camp well concealed in a brush-grown cañon up the mountain-side above Santa Inez.

On his return he found Colonel Morello himself gloomily seated in front of his tent, gazing seaward, for a good view could be obtained of the ocean from the mountain cañon without danger of the observers being themselves observed. Near the leader of the gang which Nat and his chums had broken up, sat a man in a greasy, well-worn buckskin suit. His lank, black hair dribbled over the collar of his upper garment and his mahogany-tinted face was shaded by a big cone-shaped sombrero. This man was Manuello, whom our old readers will recall as one of Colonel Morello's aides in the mountain fortress from which the boys' efforts had evicted the lawless crew. Half a dozen other men lounged about, smoking and talking. But an air of dejection hung about the camp. It was perceptible in the men's attitudes no less than in the tones in which they talked.

In fact, Colonel Morello's position was a precarious one. It is true that he was well enough concealed in the cañon above Santa Inez, but it is equally true that unless he remained there in-

definitely he ran grave risk of being captured by the indignant authorities. But Colonel Morello was not a man who did things without due thought and preparation. He was in the vicinity of Santa Inez for what were, to him, good and sufficient reasons. What these were we shall presently see. He raised his head from his reverie as Dayton's step sounded, and looked quickly up.

"Well, here you are back again," he said. "Have you any news to give us?"

The others gathered about eagerly.

"Yes; is there any vessel in the harbor we can charter?" asked one eagerly.

"I'm sick of sneaking and hiding about here," put in another. "You promised us, Morello, when you brought us here that you would charter a vessel of some sort on which we could all go to that island you know of, and keep quiet till things blew over."

"Yes," put in another, a tall, strapping fellow, in a red shirt, well-worn mackinack trousers, and much-battered sombrero, "that was the excuse

you gave for retaining possession of the money we managed to obtain from the fortress before the pursuit began. If you don't mean to do something pretty quick, you had better divide it up and let us separate and each take our chances alone."

A chorus of assent greeted this proposal.

"That's the talk, Swensen," put in one of the group, Al. Jeffries, the man who had impersonated a traveler at the Lariat Hotel. "We want action, Colonel. Your plan to get a vessel at this quiet, out-of-the-way place was a good one. What we want is to have it put into practice."

"That schooner lying in the bay is the first vessel to put in here in a week, isn't she?" growled Colonel Morello, although he was too wise to adopt anything but a mildly argumentative tone with his followers.

"That's right, but why can't we charter her?" came from Swensen.

"Yes, or that small, white craft that came round the point a short while ago and anchored

not far from the schooner?" demanded Al. Jeffries.

"We have not had time to find out about the schooner yet," reasoned Colonel Morello, "and we don't want to spoil things by rushing them. A little too much haste now might ruin all our plans. As for the small white craft——"

"I can tell you all about her," put in Dayton, who had stood silently by while this colloquy was going forward.

The others turned on him in some astonishment.

"You mean that she can be hired for our purpose?" he began. But Dayton interrupted him with a quick wave of the hand.

"I mean," he said, "that she can be no such thing. That craft is owned by those pesky young cubs, the Motor Rangers——"

He was going on, but a perfect uproar of exclamations of astonishment interrupted him. Colonel Morello finally succeeded in quelling the disturbance and Dayton went on to relate all that

he had overheard while he lay concealed by the side of the trail.

Looks of cupidity passed among the men as he reached the part of his narrative concerning the sapphires. Morello's eyes glistened greedily as he heard.

"Then they have not altogether eluded us," he said, as if he was busy with some private thoughts. "If only we could—however, that is neither here nor there. What concerns us most now is that the Motor Rangers are at Santa Inez and that we are within reaching distance of the lads we have to blame for all our troubles."

"I'd give a whole lot to get even on them," growled Swensen savagely.

But Morello checked him.

"That can all be discussed later," he said. "The thing to be done now is to ascertain if that schooner can be chartered. If she can, we have the money to pay for her, and if she can't
——"

He did not finish, but paused significantly. His eyes wandered out over the mountainside and

rested on the "Nomad" as she lay at anchor on the sun-lit bay. A small boat could be seen putting out from her side and the two men in it were giving way with a will for the shore.

"I suppose that those are the men who brought her here from wherever she came from," mused Morello. "If only we had a craft like that now."

"Well, we haven't," cut in Ed. Dayton, "so the thing to do now is to see if we can't get the hire of that schooner. We could easy sail her. Swensen here is an old navigator, and the one or two of the others have been sailors. I know something about ships myself."

"What do you propose, then?" asked Col. Morello.

"That you and I set out for Santa Inez at once and find out the lay of the land. If we can charter the schooner, well and good. If not—why then we'll have to find some other way of getting out of this hole."

It was some hours later that Captain Nelsen of the smart coasting schooner, "Nettie Nelsen," perceived, being pulled toward him from the

shore, a small row boat. He recognized it as one of those that were for hire and wondered whom the two passengers in the stern might be. He could not imagine who could be coming off to his vessel while the smart motor boat, which he had noticed come in that morning, had dropped anchor some distance off, and not in the direction in which the shore boat was being pulled.

Captain Nelsen was in a mood in which he would have welcomed any interruption to his own thoughts. Trade was bad for coasting schooners. Steam craft had taken most of it from the wind-propelled vessels, and it was only at small, unfrequented ports like Santa Inez that he could hope to pick up a cargo. But there was no redwood, no hides, and no produce of any kind awaiting transportation at the old mission town when the "Nettie Nelsen" dropped anchor there that morning. And this had proved the last straw which broke the back of Captain Nelsen's fortunes. His crew, which had only remained with him in the hopes of obtaining a cargo and thus

getting the means of liquidating their overdue wages, had deserted in a body when they discovered that there was no prospect of the "Nettie Nelsen's" holds being filled at Santa Inez.

The desertion had not been mutinous. The men admired Captain Nelsen and were sorry for him. They had simply informed him that they could work the ship no longer without pay, and had gone ashore in a body, to seek their fortunes elsewhere. Thus Captain Nelsen was left alone on his schooner, with his thoughts for company—and very poor company he found them, too.

Naturally, the desertion of the schooner had become the cause of considerable talk on shore, and when Colonel Morello and Dayton, after a careful reconnaissance, had arrived at the wharf and hired a boat for transport to the schooner, one of the first things they heard from their garrulous boatman was of the strange state of things on board the deserted craft. They had exchanged delighted glances as they heard. Surely fortune was favoring them with her smiles once more after having frowned on them so long.

And so it proved. Captain Nelsen was in no mood to haggle over the matter of chartering his schooner. Colonel Morello secured it for the sum of five hundred dollars. There was one serious drawback, however, according to his way of thinking, about the arrangements. Captain Nelsen insisted on being allowed to navigate his own vessel. He had owned and sailed her for thirty years, he said, and keen as were his necessities he would rather let her rot than place her in the hands of strangers.

And so Colonel Morello had to make the best of matters, and agree to carry Captain Nelsen as his skipper. As for the simple-minded captain, he watched the shore boat departing, when negotiations were completed, with a keen access of joy such as he had not known for some weeks.

"Five hundred dollars," he thought to himself. "Why, it will make Nettie and the children hold up their heads again. Oh, I'm in luck! It isn't every day that a down-and-out skipper has a chance of chartering his ship to a party of scientists on a research expedition to the Marquesas."

By which it will be seen that Colonel Morello had not exactly represented his party in their true light to the guileless seaman, who was as unsuspecting as most sailors are. Indeed, after he and Dayton had left the boat at the wharf they began to chuckle over the skipper's simplicity. It was almost dark, so that they did not use so much care to escape observation as they had on their way to the beach.

"Only one thing sticks in my craw," growled Dayton, "and that is that you gave that old barnacle five hundred dollars."

"I had to," protested the colonel. "I don't think he'd have struck a bargain otherwise. Said his wife and children needed the money badly and that he would have to buy extra fittings for the schooner for such a long voyage as we contemplate."

"It's a long voyage, all right," agreed Dayton. "But if things go through all right, we'll have taken a wise course. Your plan is to work our way through the islands to Australia and then sell the schooner?"

"That's my present idea," rejoined the colonel.
"How do you like it?"

"It seems to me to be a good plan," said Dayton. "Couldn't be improved on. But what will the captain say to our trying to sell his boat?"

Morello gave his companion a swift side glance as they trudged along through the dark streets.

"Perhaps he won't be there to object," he said significantly.

Dayton shrugged his shoulders.

"Colonel, you are a wonderful man," he said.
"By the way, what is the name of this friend of yours in the Marquesas? Owns a plantation there, I think you said."

"That's right," said the colonel; "he's got a big island and grows cocoanuts. Haven't seen him for some years, but I guess he'll be glad to see me again."

"American?" asked Dayton carelessly.

"Yes. I met him in that revolutionary business in Lower California."

"What's his name?"

"Gooddale—Elias Gooddale," was the reply.

CHAPTER III.

LIKE THIEVES IN THE NIGHT.

In the meantime, the Motor Rangers and their western chum had jogged into the little town, creating some excitement among the inhabitants thereof. Santa Inez was one of those sleepy, little places not uncommon along the coast of northern California, connected with the outer world only by a semi-weekly stage and by an occasional steamer. Shut in by the Coast Range to the east, and the broad Pacific to the west, its inhabitants lived an almost patriarchal existence.

Small and primitive as it was, however, the place boasted a hotel. The hostelry was not large, but still not bad of its kind, and having inquired the direction the boys made the best of their time toward it.

"I expect Captain Akers will be there already," remarked Nat, as they rode through the dusty

street, shaded by feathery pepper trees with pungent-smelling foliage.

"You told him to meet us there, then?" asked Joe.

"I did—yes. It was in the expectation that he would arrive there first. But in any event, it is no doubt the first place he will make for, expecting to hear news of us."

The party had no difficulty in engaging rooms; indeed the landlord—one Calvo Pinto—appeared as if he could not do enough for them. It was not often that the Gran Hotel De Santa Inez, as it was grandiloquently called, boasted such a numerous party of guests. As Nat told Pinto that their party might be recruited by two more, the fellow was naturally obsequious enough. In fact, he was servility itself, and bowed and cringed in most abject fashion.

All this super-civility filled Nat with a feeling of distrust. However, as they had nothing to be apprehensive over, he soon dismissed the idea from his mind.

The landlord insisted on helping them stable

their mounts. They would much have preferred to perform this duty themselves, but Pinto seemed to think it a part of his work to aid them, and they could not peremptorily order him to leave. Thus it came about, that when the pack of the burro was removed, the keen eyes of the landlord fell on the rather unusual-looking brass bound box in which the precious sapphires were carried till they could be given over to the authorities.

He asked many questions concerning the receptacle, none of which, naturally enough, were answered other than vaguely. This served to increase the landlord's curiosity, but he cunningly refrained from betraying his inquisitiveness. His speculations concerning the strange box were not allayed when, on his laying hold of it, ostensibly to help the boys into the hotel, Cal Gifford told him, rather roughly, to let go.

Pinto shrugged his shoulders, but said nothing but that he was "the servant of the señors, and their wishes should be respected."

After some consultation held in undertones, it

was decided to place the box in the room occupied by Nat and Joe. This was at one end of the hotel and boasted a stout lock on the door. Beneath the window was the flat roof of a porch.

"Handy in case of fire," remarked Nat, looking out.

"That's right," agreed Joe, "but has it occurred to you that it would be equally handy for any intruders who might wish to examine the box?"

"You mean the landlord?"

"Well, I didn't exactly like the way he looked at it."

"Pshaw," scoffed Nat, "what could a puny rat like that do against four able-bodied persons—not to mention Captain Akers and the man we noticed helping him on the 'Nomad.' However, we will keep watch to-night if you like. Hullo"—he broke off suddenly as voices were heard on the porch below—"there's Captain Akers now. He must have just come ashore. Let's shove the box in under the bed and go down and meet him.

I'm dying to hear how the 'Nomad' behaved on her trip up the coast."

Locking the door behind them, the two lads descended. On the landing they met Cal Gifford and Ding-dong Bell who shared the next room to themselves. Both had had a good wash-up, as had Nat and Joe, and the party looked considerably spruced up from the travel-stained individuals who had entered the hotel a short time before.

Captain Akers, a bluff, blond-bearded seaman, greeted them effusively. He knew all of them except Cal. The mountaineer and the sailor shook hands with a feeling of mutual respect as they surveyed each other. Both were men of action and decision and recognized those qualities in the other.

The captain's assistant on board the "Nomad" turned out to be a slender yet muscular youth, introduced by the mariner as Sam Hinckley. He was a capable young chap, said the captain, and had been of the greatest assistance to him when the "Nomad's" engine became cantankerous in a

blow she had encountered on her way up the coast. It was this that had caused the delay. But Hinckley, who possessed a wonderful knowledge of marine gasolene engines, had managed to adjust the difficulty more speedily than the captain would have thought possible.

Presently, after an enthusiastic discussion of the boat and her good points, Captain Akers drew Nat aside.

"I regard this young chap Hinckley as quite a find," he said. "He presented himself at the boat yard some time ago and said he was looking for work. Although I didn't much need a hand, I tried him out and he proved himself so capable that he was hired regularly. He has rather a remarkable history. It seems that he hails from the South Seas—somewhere in the Marquesas Group, I believe. He left there on account of some trouble he had with a relative. He did not confide to me what it was and since he did not seem anxious to let me know, I have never pressed him on this part of his history. It was sufficient for me to know that I had a good, capable workman

who, so far as I have been able to observe, is as honest as the day is long, and a thorough seaman."

"He looks all of that," agreed Nat, with a glance at Hinckley's broad shoulders and upright bearing. The young sailor stood chatting with the others at some little distance down the hotel porch.

"And now what do you say if we go out and inspect the 'Nomad'?" asked Captain Akers.

This was a proposal which naturally met with no negative votes. But right here a problem presented itself. Who was to stay to guard the sapphires; for, of course, such a thing as leaving them unwatched was not to be thought of. The question was settled by Cal Gifford, who insisted on remaining behind. Maybe the mountaineer was anxious to postpone his introduction to Old Ocean. At any rate, he seemed anxious to remain, so the boys, who were dancing about with impatience to inspect the "Nomad," did not press him very hard to change his resolution, as that

would have meant that one of their number must remain on shore.

The "Nomad" proved all that Captain Akers had claimed for her. Her main cabin was roomy and provided with a stateroom for "the owner," and several berths of the type used on sleeping cars which folded up during the day or when they were not in use. Aft of the main cabin came a tiny galley, fitted with bright, new utensils, and opposite was a washroom.

A short flight of steps led to the cockpit, forward of which the engines were located, being reached by a door from the cabin. The cockpit was of the shallow, self-baling type. From it a short flight of steps led to a miniature "bridge" placed athwartship on top of the cabin. This was surmounted by a "military-mast," with cross-trees and halliards for hoisting signals.

There were other features about the "Nomad" which will be mentioned as occasion arises. The boys enthusiastically voted her a perfect little ship.

"She's capable of taking a cruise almost anywhere!" declared Nat.

Captain Akers nodded.

"Yes, she has large auxiliary tanks for carrying an extra supply of gasolene. Her engines are so constructed, moreover, that they will consume kerosene just as well as gasolene, so that if you ever get in a part of the world where gasolene is unobtainable you can burn the other fuel, which can be found almost anywhere on the globe."

"What if the engines break down?" asked Joe Hartley, with the air of one who has propounded a poser.

"In that case all we have to do," responded Captain Akers, "is to take to sail. The 'Nomad' has an extra deep keel, fitted for just that purpose."

"But the masts?" demanded Joe.

Captain Akers raised the hinged lid of one of the lockers that ran the length of the cockpit. Inside were several lengths of rounded, varnished timber, fitted with brass sockets. They may be

compared to the dissembled sections of a fishing rod.

"There are our masts," he said. "Sockets have been provided, fore and aft, for the reception of their 'heels.' Everything is ready to attach their stays and rigging to. The sails are in that other locker. The 'Nomad' can be equipped for sail in less than half an hour."

The boys exchanged radiant glances. Truly there seemed nothing wanting to make the "Nomad" as complete a little vessel as could be desired. The inspection completed, they rowed shoreward once more. They found Cal on the watch, but nothing had occurred to require his attention. The remainder of the afternoon was spent in strolling about the little town and buying a few necessities for the voyage down the coast, for it had been determined that the start would be made in the morning, there being nothing to delay our adventurers at Santa Inez.

"How I wish we were going to cruise to the South Seas," sighed Nat.

"Never mind, maybe we will some day," put in

Joe. "The Motor Rangers seem to be always running into adventures of all kinds."

That his prophecy was to be verified, and that in no very short time, never occurred to Joe, and as for the others, they concluded that, having reached Santa Inez in safety, they were through with the most risky part of their expedition. Little did they imagine that their adventures had not yet begun.

All hands turned in early that night, for a quick start was to be made on the morrow. Sam Hinckley rowed off to the "Nomad" after supper to keep watch and ward over her for the night, while the rest sought their previously assigned sleeping quarters in the hotel.

Folks retired early to bed in Santa Inez and by ten o'clock most of the lights in the place were out. It was about this time that two figures appeared in front of the hotel, taking care, however, to keep in the dark shade of the pepper trees lining the opposite sidewalk.

The two men watched the hotel for some time in silence, listening while the landlord went his

nightly rounds, testing locks and fastening the lower windows. By and by he, too, vanished, and before long his light, which had appeared at an upper window, was extinguished.

"Shall we try for it now?" asked one of the men, slouching in the obscurity of the tree shadows.

"Not yet, Dayton. Give them time to get settled down to sleep. Is everything in readiness?"

"Yes, colonel. While you went to the camp to tell the men to be ready to embark to-night, I arranged for a boat. She is at the wharf now. All we have to do is to secure that chest, join the rest of the boys, get on board the schooner and then, 'Ho for the Marquesas!'"

"You talk as if it were all accomplished."

"And so it is, to all intents and purposes. We know the room where the boys are sleeping. That garrulous old fool of a landlord told us, when we dropped into his drinking bar, that the chest was in Nat Trevor's room. All we have to do, then, is to climb that trellis work leading up

to the porch roof, walk in through the open window, and make good our escape."

"What if they make any resistance?"

"I don't think they will," said Dayton, grimly fingering his revolver as he spoke; "but if they do, we can easily subdue them."

"But they may raise the whole town about our ears," objected Colonel Morello, who seemed to be weakening now that the actual moment for carrying out their rascally plan had arrived. Dayton, on the contrary, was confident as if they already had the sapphires on board the "Nettie Nelsen."

"Let them raise the town if they want to," scoffed Morello's lieutenant. "The boys are waiting at the landing, and at the first sign of trouble they'll start a fusillade that will scare the life out of any one who tries to interfere. Now, then, you remain on watch here. I'm going to see how the coast lies."

Morello nodded. The next moment he was alone, while Dayton, swiftly but silently, glided across the dark street. He gained the foot of

the trellis work, glanced upward for a minute, and then setting his foot in the criss-cross work began to climb. He made no more noise than a marauding cat.

His companion, watching nervously from the dark shadows, saw Dayton's form gain the porch roof, slip noiselessly across it to the boys' window, and cautiously push aside the shade.

The next instant he stepped through the casement and disappeared from Morello's view.

CHAPTER IV.

RUN DOWN

Some half hour later Dayton and Morello, carrying the heavy box between them, reached the wharf where the boat they had already mentioned was in waiting. The rest of their rascally companions were there already, impatiently awaiting the word to "shove off." The boat was one of the schooner's own and in the stern sheets sat Captain Nelsen himself.

"So the boy never wakened," Colonel Morello said, with a low chuckle, as they neared the wharf.

"No," rejoined Dayton, in a sinister tone, "and if he had, it would have been mighty unhealthy for him. Luckily, though, he had evidently fallen asleep while he was sitting up in a chair guarding the stuff. It was no trick at all to get it out from

under the bed, where they had it stowed, and lower it to you by that rope fire escape."

"Well, all is well that ends well," said Mor-ello, as they stepped down on the landing place. "But I confess that I was nervous while you were in that room. Now, captain, if you are ready, we will embark without further delay."

"Budt I am nodt retty, by der greadt Horn Schpoon," sputtered Captain Nelsen, in whose stolid mind suspicion had for some time been waxing strong. "It looks to me, by Dunder, dot der vos some dings crooked here, alreatty yedt. Vot for you vant to gedt off by der schooner adt midnightt? Vot you godt in dot box?"

Without waiting for an answer to his questions, he thrust his hand into his breast pocket and fished out a battered wallet.

"Here," he said, "I gif you back your moneys. I dond't vant to be mixed up in noddings dot looks so suspicibrious as dis sort of vork. You can' haf no monkey business by my schooner. I——"

Before the honest captain could say another word a coat was thrown over his head by one of

the men in the boat and he was violently thrown down on the thwarts. But if they thought they were going to subdue Captain Nelsen without a struggle, Morello's rascals were mistaken. The mariner, with muscles hardened in many a blow and time of stress at sea, battled like a wild cat. But, at last, sheer force of numbers outgeneraled him, and he was compelled to lie quiet at the bottom of his own boat.

"I'd have silenced him with an oar if that had kept up any longer," commented Dayton grimly. "We've lost a lot of valuable time already. Come, boys, tie that fellow up, and then give way for the schooner, lively. We'll—— What's that?"

As he uttered the abrupt exclamation, from the direction of the town there came a sound of shouting and uproar.

"They've discovered the theft!" gasped Morello scrambling into the boat after Dayton. "Pull for your lives, boys. It's prison if they catch us."

The men did not need this warning to make them give way with a will. The boat, bearing in

it the unconscious captain, fairly flew over the water toward the dark outline of the schooner.

In the meantime, the hubbub ashore increased. Lights could be seen flashing in every direction. Shouts and cries were borne clearly over the water.

"We can laugh at all that once we are on board and the anchors weighed," muttered Dayton. "There's a good breeze springing up, and by dawn we ought to be twenty miles out at sea."

But Colonel Morello suddenly recollected something that dashed their enthusiasm.

"Those boys have a motor boat!" he exclaimed.

"Concern it all, that's so," snarled Dayton. "Let's see, we've got to do some quick thinking. Is the tide setting in or out?"

"It's going out," said one of the oarsmen.

"Whatever has that to do with the matter?" snapped Colonel Morello impatiently.

"Everything," was Dayton's reply. "Boys, pull us over toward that motor boat. There—off in that direction—you can just see her white outline."

"What do you mean to do?" asked Mor-ello nervously. "We've no time to waste on foolish notions."

"This isn't a foolish notion, as you'll see," replied the other.

A few minutes more rowing brought them to the side of the motor boat. All was silent on board, Hinckley being asleep in the cabin. Captain Akers had told him that it would not be necessary to keep a strict watch, and he was making up for lost sleep on the rough voyage up by a sound slumber.

As they drew longside the "Nomad," it was seen that her stern was swung seaward, showing that the strong tide which set out of the bay was dragging her Pacificward. The anchor cable was drawn taut as a fiddle string under the strain.

Dayton stood up in the boat, and with one slash of his heavy knife he severed the stout rope, the few strands which he had not cut through parting under the strain of the tide-swung craft.

He gave a low chuckle as the "Nomad," an-

chorless and adrift, began to glide out to sea at quite a swift pace.

"Now, then," he laughed, "I guess we are ready for the schooner. From her decks we could stand off an army in rowboats, and that is the only kind of craft they can obtain now."

By the time they reached the schooner's side, so rapidly had the tide done its work, that the "Nomad" had completely vanished in the darkness, not even a dim white blur of her form showing up.

"I guess this is the time that we have the Motor Rangers checkmated to a standstill," muttered Dayton to himself, as he climbed up the side of the "Nettie Nelsen." "By the time they recover their boat we shall be miles at sea and beyond danger of pursuit."

Presently they had all gained the decks of the vessel, the chest and the unconscious form of poor Captain Nelsen being handed up, after the boat had been hauled up on the stern davits. This done, the men, under the directions of the gigantic Swensen, the former sailor, set about heaving

the anchor and ungasketing the sails preparatory to leaving the bay with all the speed they could command.

In the meantime, let us go back and see what had been occurring ashore. As the astute Dayton had surmised, Nat, who was on watch, but had been overcome by weariness, had awakened with a start a few minutes after the two rascals had set out for the wharf with the chest.

Directly he opened his eyes, one of those strange intuitions that come to us all at times apprised him that all was not well. Gazing about him, the first thing the lad noticed was that the window blind was shoved aside. It had been left that way by Dayton in the invader's hasty exit. With a queer sensation of dread, Nat, broad awake now, sprang from the chair in which he had dozed off, and made for the bed under which the chest had been hidden.

There was nothing there.

With a shout of consternation, the boy staggered back, fairly dazed by the disaster. But Nat was not a boy to remain uselessly thunder-

struck for more than a few seconds. Recovering his wits, he instantly realized what must have occurred. Somebody had entered the room by means of the porch roof and stolen the chest. But who?

As we know, none of the boys had any idea of the close vicinity of Colonel Morello's band. They deemed them, in fact, far from there, in the fastnesses of the Sierras. Nat's first suspicious thought then flashed on the landlord. The man's interest in the chest, his furtive eye and servile manner, all rushed back into the lad's recollection.

He hastily aroused Joe and apprised him of the startling thing that had occurred. Joe, scarcely less taken aback than Nat, was out of bed in an instant. Together the two boys made all speed to the room occupied by Cal and Ding-dong Bell. The mountaineer sprang to his feet with a roar of rage as Nat communicated his dire tidings. He hastily threw on his clothes, and while the rest did the same examined his revolver.

"I've a notion I may have ter use you afore

the night is over," he said, addressing the well-worn weapon as if it had been a sentient being.

As soon as they assembled once more—which was within a few minutes—Cal burst out with:

"I'll bet the hole in a doughnut that this here robbery has something to do with that crackling we heard in the chaparral this afternoon. I was pretty sure then that the noise was made by some coyote a-listenin' to our talk. I'm sure of it now. Whoever it was—and I suspect it was one of that Morello crowd—they heard enough to put them wise to the fact that we had the sapphires and meant to stop in Santa Inez ter-night. Ther rest was easy for them."

"But it would not have been had it not been for my neglect of my duty in going to sleep," said Nat bitterly. "It's all my fault. I ought to be——"

"There, lad, no use in crying over spilt milk," comforted Cal. "The thing ter do now is to find the robbers. They kain't hev got very far. And when we do find them thar'll be some fireworks."

Nat hastily communicated his suspicion about the landlord. Cal shook his head.

"I'll bet he's in bed and asleep," he said. And so, on investigation, it proved. The man, however, was honest enough to relate in full to the boys the conversation he had had in his drinking bar with the two strangers. From his description they at once recognized that Cal had been right and that in all probability the marauders were Morello and Dayton.

The landlord volunteered to rout out his friends and form a strong posse, and this was the cause of the shouts and cries that the rascals who had stolen the sapphires and set the "Nomad" adrift had heard. But having no idea in which direction the men could have gone, it was some time before Nat suggested searching the water-front. All that time had been lost in aimless hunting about under the direction of the chief of police of Santa Inez, who was also the main part of its police force.

However, the landlord had succeeded in rousing twenty or thirty citizens, all of whom were

armed, so that the posse was quite a formidable one. As they reached the water-front, Cal enjoined silence.

"If so be as they've took ter a boat," he said, "by listening quietly we kin hear ther oars."

But they listened for some minutes without hearing a sound. Suddenly Nat's sharp ears caught an odd noise. The lad, born and brought up by the sea, instantly recognized it. It was the "cheep-cheep" of blocks.

"It's that schooner," he cried, pointing to the dark blot the vessel made against the night. "They're getting up sail."

"Impossible that any one on board her could have anything to do with the robbery," decided the chief of police sagely. "I've known Captain Nelsen for many years," he went on, "and he is as honest as daylight."

"Just the same, there is something mighty queer about a schooner getting up sail at midnight," observed Nat. "If we can get a boat, I'm going to look into the matter."

Although the chief looked dubious, and many

of the others in the posse opined that they were wasting time, Nat finally gained his point. Three dories were found and commandeered and the little flotilla set off through the darkness toward the schooner. As they neared her the rattle of anchor chain as it was reeled home was distinctly heard. Also they could catch the sound of commands being given in low voices.

"By Hookey, they are getting her ready for sea," muttered the chief, in a surprised tone. "I guess you were right, boy. This looks very suspicious."

"We'd better give them a hail," suggested Nat.

The chief stood up in the boat, in which, beside Nat and himself, were Joe, Cal, and Dingdong Bell.

"Schooner ahoy!" he hailed. "We want to board you!"

The reply was prompt and removed all doubts as to the character of those on board the craft.

A flash of light split the night, followed by a sharp report. Nat, who was standing upright by the chief, felt the bullet fan his ear.

"That's for a warning," came a harsh voice. "Stand clear of this schooner, or you'll get more."

But the chief of police was by no means a coward, and this answer, instead of intimidating him, aroused him to fury.

"I am chief of police of this town," he cried. "In the name of the law, I command you to lay to."

A sneering laugh was the only rejoinder. It was followed, however, by a scattering fire.

This was the last straw with the chief.

"Let 'em have it, boys!" he shouted.

In obedience to his command the posse opened fire on the dark form of the schooner. It is doubtful, however, if they did much damage, as the night was too black to make out more than her outline.

But the men on board now had the sails up. The pyramids of canvas loomed up like spires against the dark background of the night. The rushing of water under her forefoot as she began to move could be distinctly heard.

"By Thunder, we'll stop that craft, or know the reason why," roared the chief.

At that same instant there came a shout from the schooner's bow.

"Out of the road, or we'll run you down, you swabs!"

"Great Heavens!" cried Nat. "They've changed their course. Out of the way, quick, or they'll sink us!"

But before any one in the boat had recovered his wits at this sudden and dangerous turn of events, the great form of the schooner loomed above them like some menacing tower.

"Back water! Back water!" screamed Nat.

But before he could utter another word, there was a terrific shock. The schooner's sharp bow had crashed clean into the boat. The air was filled with shouts and cries.

Nat felt the boat sinking under him, and, mustering all his strength, he sprang upward aiming for the "dolphin striker," which loomed right above him.

But even as he sprang he felt a sudden sharp pain pass through him. A million constellations swam sparkingly before his eyes and then his senses went out amid the turmoil about him.

CHAPTER V.

NAT IN DIRE STRAITS.

Nat's returning senses did not come to him till some time later. When they did they revealed his situation as one of the strangest, surely, in which any lad was ever placed.

"Good gracious!" thought Nat, as his eyes opened. "What can have——"

Swash!

A mass of green water swept over him, choking the words back down his throat and half drowning him. But the immersion in the not-over chilly water revived him fully and a few seconds sufficed to show him that he was lying half across the bobstay of the schooner's bowsprit, just aft of the "dolphin striker"—as the sharp spar that sticks out beneath the bowsprit is called.

There was a dull throbbing in Nat's head and he felt numb and stiff. But another roller break-

ing over him at that instant, as the schooner took a plunge, convinced him that he must muster all his strength to get out of his perilous position or be miserably drowned.

A pallid, gray dawn lay over the waters and Nat, after he had, by a supreme effort, worked his way up the bobstay to a higher position, saw to his dismay that the schooner must be some distance out at sea. She seemed to be rushing through the water at a speed which he estimated at about ten knots an hour. Allowing then that the time was about four-thirty, she must have made some forty miles or more since midnight.

Nat placed his hand to his head, which ached cruelly. He found that it was cut quite badly, but luckily the wound was only a flesh one and his involuntary salt water bath had washed it clean.

"When the schooner struck the boat," he mused. "I remember jumping upward and nothing after that. The dolphin striker must have hit me but it seems I had wits enough left to cling on to the bobstay. A good thing I had, too, or

I'd be in Davy Jones' locker by this time. I wonder what became of the rest of them. Thank goodness, Joe, Ding-dong, and Cal can all swim, and if they were not knocked insensible they are all right."

Nat looked about him once more. Above him the jibs of the schooner were bellying whitely out under the fresh breeze. Beneath him the water boiled under the smart craft's sharp prow. All about—the rising sun gilding it—was the heaving waste of the broad Pacific.

Truly Nat was in a quandary. Remain where he was he could not. Even had it not been for the impossibility of doing without food or water he could momentarily feel himself growing weaker. Before the cut in his head had stopped bleeding, he reasoned that he must have lost considerable vital fluid.

"What am I to do?" thought Nat to himself. "I recognized Morello's voice when he shouted that warning just before the boat was struck. My life aboard this schooner will be worth just about what it would be in a den of savage tigers.

Even if it were not for the grudge Morello owes me for betraying his fortress in the Sierras, he has sufficient reason to wish me out of the way. What am I to do?" he concluded, with the same question with which he had begun his gloomy ruminations.

The question was unexpectedly answered for him. Swensen, in his capacity as sailing master of the schooner, came forward at that moment to look at the headsails. After peering aloft in sailor fashion he squinted over the bow to see how the "Nettie Nelsen" was cleaving the waters. Hardly had he poked his blond head over the bow before he became aware of Nat clinging to his precarious perch, and busy with his gloomy thoughts.

"Hul-lo!" he roared. "Dere bane boy on der bobstay, by Yiminy!"

His shout brought Morello and Dayton and half a dozen others—among them the ill-favored Manuello—to the bow. They echoed the Swede's shout, as in the wet-through, miserable figure clinging to the bobstay and looking up at them

they recognized the boy who had done more than any one else to bring their rascally careers to a termination.

For a breath absolute silence reigned. Nat, who had looked up at the sudden shout of the Swede and seen the latter's shock head peering down at him, kept still because he felt that it was useless to do anything else. Morello and the others were tongue-tied temporarily from sheer, crass, amazement.

They had confidently believed that when they sunk the boat they had likewise sunk all on board her, or, failing that, had at least shaken off all pursuit. But here, confronting them like a ghost, was the form of the boy they most hated and detested. Morello's eyes fairly snapped delight as he beheld Nat thus thrust into his power. The evil glint of his black orbs found an answering expression of joy in Dayton's. The rascals could hardly believe their luck. Morello was the first to gain his voice.

"So," he snarled, with his sinister sneer more marked than ever, "we meet again, Señor Motor

Ranger. But the circumstances are rather different to what they were in the cañon."

"Yes," rejoined Nat calmly, "there, if I recollect rightly, you all were running for your lives."

"You forget the old proverb, Señor Trevor: 'He who fights and runs away will live to fight some other day.' However, you see now that it is verified. Here are we with a fine schooner under our feet, your sapphires in our possession, and the world before us. While you—— Well, I would not be in your shoes for a good deal."

He chuckled in an ominous manner as he spoke. Nat said nothing. He felt it would be utterly useless to reply to the man. Wholly in the power of the merciless ruffians, as he knew himself to be, he felt that his best policy lay in not irritating them any further than possible.

"Are you coming on deck, or would you prefer to be thrown into the sea?" sneered Ed. Dayton savagely, casting a look of hatred on Nat.

"I'd prefer to come on deck," responded Nat, determined not to show a trace of the real fear

that he felt. "If you'll throw me a rope, I can scramble up."

"Oh, we'll throw you a rope fast enough," grinned Morello maliciously. "Maybe it will be a rope to hang yourself with."

Nevertheless, in a few seconds a rope with a noose in the end of it came snaking down, and Nat, fastening the noose under his armpits, was drawn up over the bow and an instant later he stood on the swaying foredeck of the "Nettie Nelsen" in the midst of his enemies.

The group gathered there scowled at the lad with malevolent expressions, but none of them made a move to touch him. Perhaps they felt that he was so completely in their power now that it was no use hastening their revenge. Morello fairly gloated as he regarded the boy.

"Oh, this is luck," he exclaimed; "a bit of unheard-of good fortune. Here we are fleeing from the place from which you and your brats of companions drove us, and we actually pick you up off our bowsprit forty miles out at sea."

"The question is what are you going to do with

me?" spoke up Nat boldly enough, though his heart sank direfully.

"Ah, that we have not yet decided," chuckled Morello, rubbing his hands; "but you must know that I am notable for avenging myself on those who have wronged me."

"Wronged you," burst out Nat. "I should think that having been driven from the Sierras, and your lawless ways terminated, that you would have decided that an honest life would be best, and——"

He stopped short as Ed. Dayton, unable to control himself any longer, made two swift steps toward the boy he hated, and, raising his hand, struck Nat a blow across the face before the lad had time to defend himself. But while the malicious grin still hovered on Dayton's face and he was still exclaiming:

"That's for the blow you gave me at Santa Barbara," Nat was upon him.

The cowardly bully was no match for the wiry, muscular lad, weakened by exposure and his wound, though the latter might be. Dayton

came crashing down to the deck with Nat on the top of him before any of the others, who had been completely taken by surprise, could interfere.

The instant they recovered their senses the rascally crew hurled themselves upon Nat, beating and cuffing him. Kicks were not spared, either. It would have gone hard with the lad if Colonel Morello's voice had not suddenly struck in.

"Stop! Stop that instantly! Manuello! You, Larson; you, Britt and Hicks! Let that boy up!"

Grumblingly they arose, leaving Nat lying half unconscious on the deck. Casting the lad's limp form to one side, Dayton, too, got on his feet, pouring forth a torrent of foul language.

"It served you right, Dayton," was all the comfort he obtained from Colonel Morello. "The boy is absolutely in our power. There is no need for haste in taking our revenge."

"I'd like to make the cub walk the plank," bel-
lowed Dayton, feeling his eye, which was rapidly swelling where Nat's fist had struck it.

"We will think of something better than that—"

something more original," purred the colonel, in his silkiest tones. "In the meantime, you, Hicks, and you, Britt, take this young whelp down to the forehold. Tie him to a stanchion down there till I get ready to deal with him."

Nat, who had by this time staggered painfully to his feet, could not repress a shudder at the words and at the tone in which they were spoken. To his chagrin, his temporary accession of weakness was swiftly noted by Morello, who grinned delightedly.

"Ah, you may well shudder," he exclaimed. "Bolder people than you have shuddered and turned pale before when they faced Colonel Morello."

Nat did not reply. For one thing he felt weak and dizzy. His head had started bleeding again, following his struggle with Dayton and his subsequent suppression. Moreover, he was in need of food and water. To his surprise, as he was led away by Britt and Hicks, Colonel Morello gave the men orders to feed the boy as soon as possible.

"We don't want him to die before we are through with him," he explained to Dayton, who was inclined to protest against this seeming humanity.

The young Motor Ranger did not hear this remark. It was as well that he did not. His spirits were quite low enough already.

CHAPTER VI.

THE VOICE IN THE DARK.

The forehold into which Nat was conducted proved to be a dark, musty smelling place. Stanchions, like the pillars of a church, held up the deck above them. By the hollow ring of his and his guardians' feet on the floor Nat could tell that there must be yet another hold below the one in which it seemed he was to be made prisoner.

The men, none too gently, secured him hand and foot to one of the stanchions. Then, without a word, they turned and left him, ascending the steep ladder by which they had entered the hold. The next instant the light which filtered into the hold through the hatchway was shut out as the aperture was closed with a bang.

Nat, weak, drenched, and half starved, and wounded moreover, found himself in total black-

ness. He could move neither hand nor foot, although the instant the light was excluded he could hear the scuttling of huge ship rats all about him.

Brave as the boy was who shall blame him if, for a few moments, he gave way utterly and shouted and raved at the top of his voice. But a calmer interval succeeded. That wonderful little lamp which we call hope, and which persists in lighting up the darkest places, still burned—though dimly—in Nat's heart.

"Come," he thought to himself, "giving way like a baby will do me no good. Perhaps some way will appear of escape from this situation. When I was Morello's prisoner in the fortress in the Sierras things looked almost as bad, but they came out all right in the end. All I can do is to keep on hoping, anyway. If it only wasn't for those horrible rats, I'd feel better."

The loathsome creatures scampered round Nat's feet and legs and occasionally he could almost feel them touch him.

"Scat!" he would cry out at such moments, but

that only produced a temporary panic among the noisome vermin. The next instant they would be back again. And they grew bolder every time. It seemed to Nat almost as if they knew he was nothing but a helpless prisoner.

After what appeared ages of time had elapsed, the hatchway opened once more and Britt and Hicks reappeared. They brought with them two steaming dishes of food and a jug of water. Setting these down as they arrived at Nat's side, they loosened his arm bonds to allow him to eat. His legs, however, were still secured tightly to the stanchion.

"Don't see what the skipper wants ter give yer a thing ter eat fer," growled the man Britt, savagely glaring at Nat. "If I wuz him, I'd starve you to death."

"I don't doubt it," said Nat, cheerfully taking a long pull at the water pitcher. Then he proceeded to pitch into the two tin pans which proved to contain, one of them a sort of stew and the other some potatoes.

"If it hadn't bin fer you and them other

whelps," snarled Hicks, "we'd a bin in ther Sieras right now, instid of bin aboard this old windjammer bound fer the South Seas. What's ther name uv ther place again, Britt?"

"Why, ther island is called Ho-dear-me, or some sich name. It's in the Mar-kiss-us group."

"Oh, dear me, eh?" snarled Hicks. "Wall, that'll be a good name fer it so far as this younker is consarned. I overheard Morello telling Dayton a while ago that he meant ter keep ther kid in suspense till we reached the island and then take his revenge on him in some novel sort of a way."

"And no more than he deserves, the sneaking, young cur," grated out Britt. "I'd keel haul him. That's what I'd do."

As may be imagined, this conversation interested as well as dismayed Nat. After he had finished his meal and the men, with curses, rebound him and then left the hold, he fell to thinking hard over what he had heard.

"Well, it's evident," mused Nat, "that Morello is seeking some safe asylum where he can hide

from the long arm of the law. I guess from what those two fellows said the island he is bound for is some place down in the Marquesas Group, although what particular island Oh-dear-me, as they called it, can be I have no idea. If only I could see an atlas!"

As this thought flashed through his mind, Nat gave a sad smile. It had just occurred to him that if he could see an atlas, he would be free. He resumed his reverie. For one thing, by keeping his mind busy he managed to prevent himself from dwelling too much on the utter apparent hopelessness of his position, for another, it made the time pass more quickly.

One thing cast a ray of light into his gloomy state of mind, and that was that from what Britt and Hicks had said it seemed that he was not to meet his fate till they reached the island. Nat began to hope that between the present and that time some sort of opportunity to escape might present itself.

If only he could get some word to his friends, but that was an impossibility, so absolute as not

to bear thinking about. No, whatever was to be accomplished would have to be carried out by Nat himself. That much was evident.

But a relapse came following his temporary accession of better spirits. How was he, a lad, alone among so many ferocious enemies, to accomplish anything? No, it was impossible. He had been a fool ever to think that there 'was a chance for him to escape. He would be slaughtered—perhaps tortured—he had heard of such things—by Morello and his men, and then cast into an unmarked grave in some desolate tropic isle. The thought was too much to bear.

"I won't die like that! I won't! I won't!" screamed Nat, in a perfect frenzy.

But he checked his outburst suddenly. A chill of horror crept over him. Was he beginning to lose his senses in the darkness?

For Nat could have sworn that through the gloom there had come a strange sound. The sound of a cautioning human voice. He strained his ears. Perhaps there would be a repetition of the sound. Yes, there it was again.

"Hi-i-i-s-t!"

"Who are you?" shouted Nat. "Are you a man, or am I delirious?"

"Donnervetter, I'm a man, all right," came the response, in a strong foreign accent; "undt up till lastdt night I voss captain. Budt who in der name of der great horn spoons voss you?"

"An unfortunate boy whom these rascals have made a prisoner and whom they are planning to kill," rejoined Nat, in an agitated voice.

"Voss," grunted the other; "dey is making prisoners of boys on my ship alretty! By Yupiter, I see vot I do aboutd dis if ever I get oudt uv dis scrape."

"Then you are in trouble, too?"

"You might say I voss in it up by mein ears alretty," was the doleful response; "but vait, I strike a light und den vee see each oder more betterer."

A scraping sound followed. Then came the sputtering glare of a match and that in turn was succeeded by the cheerful yellow glow of a candle. Oh, how blessed that light seemed to Nat

and how thrice blessed the kindly, weather-beaten countenance that it illuminated, peering curiously at the tightly bound boy.

"So!" grunted the German gutterally, as his eyes fell on Nat's plight. "Der rascals treat you as badt as dey would have done me if I hadn't bin too much uv a sharpness fer them. Vait a minutes. I soon fix dose ropes."

He drew a big seaman's knife and rapidly slashed Nat's bonds. But the boy was so stiffened that he could hardly stand, even with his ropes off.

"Ach himmel! Dot is badt," muttered the other, looking at him concernedly. "Py der vay, I dond't tell it to you my name alretty yet. I vos Captain Nelsen."

"Captain Nelsen!" echoed the boy, in some astonishment.

"Yah, der captain uv dis schooner before dose rascals soak me by der headt und take her away from me."

"Then you are a prisoner, too?"

"In a vay, yah; in anuudder vay, nein. You

see, dey is not much goot as navigatioers, dese loafers, so dey promise to spare my life if I work der schooner down to der Marquesasas for dem. Dey go to some island dere. I don't know yet yust vot island it vos."

"But how came you down here?" asked Nat, feeling very curious at this surprising turn of events.

For answer the captain raised one fat forefinger mysteriously.

"Hush," he said, "I dink me dot I findt out a vay to escape alretty."

As he spoke a sudden step sounded above them and the next instant the hatchway was jerked open by some unseen hand. Like a flash the captain puffed out the candle and in considerable apprehension Nat and his new-found friend waited in the pitch darkness for whatever was to come.

CHAPTER VII.

A DESPERATE PLAN.

But it proved to be only a false alarm. While Nat's heart beat till it shook his frame and he crouched back in the shadows and Captain Nelsen did the same they were not destined to be discovered that time. Whoever had raised the hatch contented himself with peering into the gloomy hold which, fortunately, was so dark that he could see nothing. Presently he slapped the hatch cover to again, and Nat began to breathe more freely.

"Hum dot vos an escapeness of der narrowness," commented the captain. "I dink me vee hadt bedder nodt light up der candle vunce more. Idt might leadt to dere finding us by der inside mit der hold."

Nat agreed with him.

"What did you mean when you spoke of escape just now?" he asked.

The captain sank his voice to a mysterious whisper and explained. As his explanation was somewhat lengthy, we shall not bother the reader by rendering it in the captain's dialect, but shall set it down in plain English as being less tedious.

Captain Nelsen then, after informing Nat of the events leading up to his chartering his schooner to a party of "scientists en route to the Marquesas," proceeded to elucidate how he came to be in the dark hold at such a lucky moment for Nat. Doubtless, because they felt he was entirely at their mercy, the invaders of the schooner allowed him to roam around as he would. In this way it had come about that when the captain pleaded sleepiness he had been allowed to retire to his cabin in the stern of the schooner without arousing suspicion in the mind of Morello.

But Captain Nelsen's cabin possessed a feature which, had Morello been aware of it, would have resulted in the skipper's sleeping quarters being changed. This feature was nothing more

or less than a trap-door in the floor. This trap-door had formerly led into a specie room; for at one time the "Nettie Nelsen" had plied in Alaskan waters and not infrequently valuable shipments of gold were made on board her.

The specie room had, however, been long disused, and a door fitted in it which led into the upper hold in which Nat was confined. Captain Nelsen therefore no sooner found himself alone in his cabin than he opened this trap-door, having first pulled up the strip of carpet which covered it. This done he lowered himself into the specie room and thence emerged into the hold.

In doing all this he had, as may be imagined, an object. That object was nothing more or less than a daring plan of escape that had formed itself in his brain. Had he not been skipper and owner of the "Nettie Nelsen" he would never have thought of such a plan, for it hinged upon a forgotten feature in the schooner's construction—namely, an unused port situated in the overhang of her stern, and just beneath the main cabin.

This port—an opening some three feet long by four wide, had been made when the “Nettie Nelsen,” among her numerous other employments, had plied in the lumber trade. It formed a convenient place to thrust long boards or planks through direct from the dock alongside which she might be lying, thus saving the labor of loading her holds by derricks. When steamships drove the “Nettie Nelsen” and her fellow sailing vessels out of the coasting lumber trade, the port had been closed. Several coats of paint now lay over it on the outside, but inside it was still possible to remove it and leave a big opening by turning some screws.

The captain had been in the act of investigating the port when he had heard Nat’s despairing cry, which had alarmed him almost as much as his exclamation had startled Nat.

“Idt vill be dark in a short time now,” confided the captain, as he concluded; “ven it is quiet dark I come down again und open der port.”

“And then what?” asked Nat, his heart pounding excitedly.

“Und den ve eider get away oder ve gedt in der soup vorse dan ever,” declared the captain.

“But how? We cannot drop through the port and into the sea,” exclaimed Nat. “Have you got life belts or something?”

“Ach,” interrupted the captain impatiently, “I haf somdings better yet dan dot alretty. No, by Yupiter, ven ve go, ve go in style. Ve go in a boat.”

“In a boat!” echoed Nat. “I must be very dense, captain, but you’ll have to explain this thing to me some more.”

“Very vell. I explins meinself more explicitly den. Der ship’s boadt hangs on davits over the stern. Ven I go py der deck dis evening I yust careless like dangle down a rope over der taffrail—dot is if I gedt it a chance. Den ven ve open der port all ve got to do is to wait our chance undt den reach out for dot rope, swarm up idt und lower der boat. Aber den ve lower ourselves, und by daybreak der schooner be miles away undt maybe some steamer or oder vessel bick us up. Dot is goodt scheme, yah?”

"It sounds all right, captain, but it fairly bristles with difficulties."

"Mein son," admonished the old seaman softly, "difficulties vos dings made to come over alretty. Und now, as your limbs are rested, I vill tie you up again so dot if any one comes down dey suspect noddings."

It was necessary for the captain to light his candle once more to perform this office. He did it with a sailor's celerity, chattering all the while.

"Now den," he said, when it was done, "I go back py my cabins. Den I votch a chance to drop dot rope over der rail. Now keep up a goodt heart, my poy, for if Got vills it so, ve vill be oudt of dis craft py midnighds."

At these words Nat could have shouted aloud for joy. Wild as the captain's scheme would have appeared to any one in different circumstances, to the boy—in his present desperate straits—it seemed far better than it had looked at first blush. In fact, the more he thought it over, the more inclined Nat was to think that, with a meas-

ure of reasonably good luck, they might be able to carry it through.

Some time later Hicks alone came below, and holding up a lantern gave Nat a casual inspection. It was fortunate that it did not enter his lazy mind to make it a more thorough one, or he might have detected that the ropes had been cut and then reknotted. But he was in a hurry to get back to a card game he had been enjoying when Morello had ordered him below, and after bestowing a curse on Nat he left once more.

"I hope nobody else takes a fancy to come below and examine me more thoroughly," thought Nat. "I wonder how the captain is making out. If all has gone well, he ought to have carried out the first part of his program by this time."

But it was some hours—to Nat it appeared years—before his newly found friend appeared once more. This time he boldly carried a lantern as he emerged from the doorway of the old specie room. He explained this seeming lack of caution by saying that Morello and Dayton had both

turned in for a heavy drinking bout, and that most of the crew were befuddled also.

"Dere iss only der man by der helm to look out for, und I guess ve can take care of him," he said, as, for the second time, he loosed Nat.

"And now," said Nat, as he stood free, "what next?"

Captain Nelsen produced a wrench. It was only a small one—a nickled bicycle tool, in fact—but he said that it would do to unfasten the bolts of the port through which they were to creep on their perilous attempt.

It was hard work getting the bolts loose with the small tool. But at last it was accomplished. Nat with difficulty stifled a whoop of pure joy as, the last bolt having been removed, they cautiously worked the port out of its place and, through the opening thus revealed, they saw the stars shining softly above the vast, lonely Pacific.

"Aber, so far so goodt," breathed the captain. He reached out, and after some feeling about grasped a dangling rope. It was the one he had

found an opportunity to drop down earlier in the night. Dragging it inside the port, he turned to Nat.

"Der next step you vill haf to dake," he said, almost in an apologetic tone. "I am nodt so young as I vos vunce, und I'm afraid dot I make some noise mit my stiff old joints ven I go climbing abodt."

"Of course, I'll go up after the boat," said Nat hastily, "but first tell me is the steersman near to the helm?"

"No, der veel of der 'Nettie Nelsen' is quiet a distance from der tiller," said Captain Nelsen. "I hadt it built dot vay pecose mit der veel over der tiller she steered badly. If you haf luck, der helmsman vill nodt see you."

As there was no use hesitating any longer Nat grasped the rope. First, however, he removed his shoes and stockings. This was both for greater ease in climbing and also so that he would not make any more noise than was necessary.

"Well, here goes," he said, as with the rope in his hands he reached the edge of the opening

and prepared to wriggle through. But the captain stopped him. The old seaman held out his right hand. Nat, perceiving what he meant, clasped it in a fervent grip.

"Got pless you," said the captain, with some emotion in his gruff tones. "You are a prave poy."

The next instant Nat was through the open port, the captain extinguishing the lantern as the lad vanished.

Nat was a good and an active climber, but to climb a rope in a "gym" is quite a different matter to ascending one when it is dangling loosely from the stern of a plunging schooner ploughing her way briskly over a heaving sea under a smart breeze.

As his body came on the cable Nat was swung about like the weight on a pendulum. Below him boiled the white wake of the "Nettie Nelsen." Mustering every ounce of his strength, he began to ascend the rope. But the task was the hardest he had ever tackled. Swung dizzily hither and thither through space, the boy's brain reeled and

spun. But he stuck to it pluckily and by dint of sheer hard, gritty work he at length managed to clamber as high as the break of the stern, and attain the level of the stern cabin windows.

But as he reached it something happened which came very nearly terminating the night's adventure then and there. A sudden lurch of the schooner, coming as Nat reached for the solid, wooden stern works, flung him violently outward at the end of the rope. For one instant he impended dizzily above the gleaming white wake of the vessel. The next he was dashed with stunning violence toward the stern.

As he was swung inward with terrific velocity Nat, more by instinct than anything else, let go with one hand and held the released member out in front of him with the idea of breaking the impact of the blow against the "Nettie Nelsen's" stern.

But instead of striking solid wood, his fist, to his surprise, encountered something yielding—the shade of the open cabin port, in fact. Before Nat could quite realize what had occurred he

heard a deafening crash within the cabin itself as some glass or chinaware, which had been standing in the open port, was knocked to the floor when his fist struck the shade.

At the same instant from within the cabin came an angry shout:

“What in the name of old Harry was that?”

Nat hastily dropped some distance down his rope as he heard footsteps crossing the cabin floor. Evidently, whoever had uttered the shout, meant to investigate the cause of the accident. The shade was pushed aside and Nat saw a head thrust out. His discovery appeared inevitable.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW IT WORKED OUT.

What with the stunning effect of the blow he had received as he was swung against the schooner's stern works and the shock of the accident which had followed, Nat's senses almost left him for an instant. Like one in a dream he hung there, just under the swell of the vessel's counter and listened to the voices above him. They were Colonel Morello's and Ed. Dayton's.

"What in the name of Beelzebub was it?" he heard Dayton's harsh voice inquiring.

"I don't know. I could have sworn for an instant that I saw the flash of a hand through the window," growled out Morello—evidently from the nearness of the sound he still had his head outside the cabin port.

"Bah! How could that be?" scoffed Dayton

from within, "unless the schooner is haunted. It must have been the last lurch she gave."

"That must have been it," agreed Morello, withdrawing his head, "but, at any rate, our supply of liquor was knocked off that shelf and the bottle broken. What do you say if we go forward and get some more?"

"The very thing," Nat could hear Dayton reply. The next instant he heard the slam of a door float through the open port above him and knew that the cabin must be empty.

Now was his time to act then, and fortunately for him, with his returning senses there had come a slight lull in the wind. The schooner was steadier, and by dint of pressing his knees against her structure when he climbed above the overhang of the stern he managed to ascend at a famous rate.

All at once he found himself opposite the cabin window once more. The blind or shade that his unlucky swing had knocked aside was now open, however, and he could plainly see the interior of the place. His curiosity quite overcame his pru-

dence, as, steadying himself by pressing his feet into some scroll work contrived about the vessel's name on the stern, he gazed eagerly into the apartment which was lighted by a powerful hanging lamp.

But hardly had his eyes taken in the details of the place and observed that it was empty, Dayton and Morello having both departed to replenish the spirit bottle, before his eyes lit on something that made him start and hold his breath.

In plain view within and right below the cabin window was the sapphire chest.

From his position Nat could almost by an effort have reached within and touched it. The sight of the plundered box raised within him a strange feeling of anger against the rascals who had stolen it. All fear seemed to drop from him like a garment. As he gazed one of those strange accessions of desperate resolve which come sometimes in moments of intense peril visited him.

"Why would it not be possible to regain the

box, and, in the event of their plan being successfully carried out, take it with them in the boat?"

It seemed to Nat that hardly had the idea flashed into his mind before, impelled by some strange, irresistible resolve, he was within the cabin, having scrambled through the port, dragging his rope in with him. Barefooted as he was, he made no more noise than a panther tracking its game.

In the same noiseless manner in which he had entered the place he glided across the carpeted floor to the door leading on to the deck, by means of a companionway. Within it was a heavy bolt and massive chain, relics no doubt of the same epoch that had witnessed the construction of the specie room. It was the work of an instant to slip the bolt into place and then adjust the chain. This done, the lad was secure from interruption for a few moments at any rate. Even if he could not accomplish the feat of transferring the chest to the boat he could at least carry out a desperate resolve he had formed. This was no less than at all hazards to deprive the rascals of the benefits

they had filched. Nat had determined that if he were discovered before he had had time to complete his work that he would heave the chest through the port and into the sea, thus losing the sapphire hoard to Morello and his men for all time.

But Nat had high hopes that he would have time to put through the plan of escape as he and Captain Nelsen had planned it out together. Slipping back across the cabin floor, he took the end of his rope and made a double half hitch around the chest, which, to his surprise, was not nearly as heavy as he had imagined it would be. This, however, he attributed to his excitement.

He had just completed this work and was about to heave the chest, with the rope attached, out of the port when something happened that seemed to drive every drop of blood in his body into his heart and then send it racing in a mad torrent through his veins.

Click!

This was the sound that had made Nat glance up from his work in time to behold one of the

stateroom doors that opened off the cabin swinging ajar.

The next instant it was opened fully and the huge form of Swensen, the giant Swede, stalked out.

Nat was motionless as a frightened rabbit. In the dreadful crisis he was temporarily deprived of the power of crying out or moving.

Swensen's eyes fixed themselves on the boy with a peculiar expression, and in his bare feet—for he was in his night clothes—he began to advance toward him. Closer and closer he came and still Nat stood, held by a dreadful spell that bound his limbs and fettered his tongue—not indeed that it would have done him any good to have cried out.

But suddenly—just as suddenly as he had appeared—Swensen turned and in the same slow, deliberate way started back toward his cabin. It was then that Nat noted something that in his alarm he had not seen before.

The man was asleep!

He had walked out of his cabin in a fit of

somnambulism, or sleep-walking, and now he re-entered it again and doubtless climbed back into his bunk.

Hardly had his immense bony form vanished and the door clicked to behind him once more before Nat had the chest out of the port and then when it swung at the end of the rope, dropping like the weight on a plumb line, he followed it.

His rope was now much easier to climb, for it was steadied by the weight of the chest at its lower end. The length of the line was sufficient to allow the chest to dangle within a foot or two of the water.

With renewed courage Nat swarmed on up the rope and presently was able to poke his head over the taffrail. As Captain Nelsen had said, the helmsman, by reason of the peculiar steering device of the "Nettie Nelsen," was some little distance from the stern, forming an additional protection in the work that lay before him. Between Nat and the man at the wheel there was a big pile of canvas and boxes, apparently left

there by some of the gang after they had ransacked the schooner.

At any rate, Nat managed to clamber up into the boat, which hung out on her davits, without attracting any attention from the man. Once in the boat, the lad took a swift look about him. At the helm was the steersman, a soft light thrown up on his rugged features from the binnacle. From forward some stentorian voice was roaring out a chorus. Nat devoutly hoped that the noise might keep up, for it was not to be supposed that he could lower the boat in absolute quietness.

All at once something happened that sent him crouching down in the bottom of the dingy. Morello and Dayton suddenly appeared on the stern. The former addressed the helmsman.

"We're in for some bad weather, Larsen. You'll have to stand an extra trick at the wheel, for all hands will be needed on the sails."

As he listened, Nat noticed what in his excitement he had hitherto overlooked. A remarkable change had come over the night. The stars were

blotted out and the wind had fallen till it was almost a dead calm. In the lull the schooner rolled heavily, her sails flapping and her blocks cracking complainingly.

Suddenly off to the west a vivid red streak split the sky. It was followed after an interval by the heavy booming of thunder.

"I'll go below and call Swensen," Nat heard Dayton say.

The boy's pulses bounded. If Dayton carried out this resolve, it meant that he would discover that the cabin door was locked on the inside and suspicion would instantly be aroused. In the search which would certainly follow he would be discovered, and also Captain Nelsen. What their fate would be in such a case Nat dared not think.

But fortunately Colonel Morello vetoed this proposal.

"Let him have his sleep out," he said; "the storm won't be on us for some time yet, and Hicks can take care of the work of shortening sail."

"Well, how about that old sea horse, Captain

Nelsen?" were the next words of Dayton. Nat's heart fairly stood still for an instant and then gave a terrified bound as Colonel Morello exclaimed:

"By Beelzebub, I had forgotten him. Go below and rout him out."

CHAPTER IX.

ADrift IN THE PACIFIC.

But hardly had Dayton started on the errand which would have spelled disaster to the hopes of Nat and his friend when something happened that, for the time being at least, put all other thoughts out of their heads.

There was a sharp warning shout from forward, followed by a splitting, tearing sound.

The schooner heeled sharply, throwing Nat the length of the boat in which he was concealed. A sharp puff of wind—hot as if from an opened oven door—swept over the sea and passed on. It left the air motionless as before, but it had stripped the schooner of her headsails as Nat could make out by the shouts and cries on her decks.

Utterly forgetting his duty in the emergency—indeed in the dead calm which had followed he

was not of any particular use at the wheel—the helmsman followed Colonel Morello and Dayton as they bounded forward.

The moment to act had arrived. Rapidly Nat cast off the falls, belaying them around a cleat. Then he paid out on them and the boat dropped rapidly and noiselessly to the water. A moment later Captain Nelsen, who had been on the look-out, reached out for the dangling rope to the end of which the sapphire chest was attached. He caught it and slid into the boat with the dexterity of a seaman.

“Great Bull Whales, lad,” he exclaimed as he landed in the little craft, “voss vos keeping you such a dime? You haf hadt me scared by mein death aind’t idt. I dought me sure dot dey had caught you.”

“What kept me captain?” repeated Nat, in a breathless voice. “Just this.”

He indicated the sapphire chest dangling just above them.

“Donnerblitzen, boy, vos iss dot? Provisions?”

"No, sir. It's the sapphire chest I told you about. The one that these scamps robbed me of."

"Ach himmel, undt you gedt it back. Poy, you iss a vounder, aind't idt? Budt don't told it to me aboutd it now alretty. Ledt me hear it later. Vee haf no time to lose."

Reaching up Nat cut the rope that held the chest suspended and exerting his strength lowered it into the boat.

"Now then, we're ready," he said, getting out the oars. "I think—hark!"

From the cabin port above them there came a roar—a bull-like bellow of rage. It was Swensen's voice. Evidently he had just awakened and discovered that the chest had vanished.

"Morello! Dayton!" they could hear him thunder out. "Der chest! Der chest bane gone!"

"Undt it's time dot vee bane gone, too," echoed Captain Nelsen. "Gif vay mit dose oars, ladt."

"Which way shall I pull, captain?"

"Any place away friom der schooner. Pretty soon dis be like vun hornets' nest, alretty yet."

Nat needed no urging, and began to propel

the boat in a direction which was easterly, although he took no particular account of it. The sea hardly heaved and it had grown blisteringly hot. The schooner as they left her was wallowing in the heavy swell like a dead whale.

"Py Yupiter, dere go der firevorks," exclaimed Captain Nelsen, as more and more water showed between the schooner and the boat.

He was right; there were "fireworks" on board the "Nettie Nelsen." Swensen had burst from the cabin, first undoing the locks and bolts like an infuriated bull. It had not taken him long to communicate his tidings to Morello and Dayton. The discovery that the boat had gone almost instantly followed, giving those on board an easy clue as to how their prisoners had escaped.

"Shoudt away! Shoudt away!" grinned Captain Nelsen to himself. "Vee godt der only boat on board der 'Nettie Nelsen,' undt if you want us, you got to swim for us, by Yupiter!"

This was true. In the dead calm which prevailed it was obviously impossible to work the schooner even had her headsails not been in such

sad disorder. But if they reckoned on getting off scot free, the two adventurers in the boat were sadly mistaken.

All at once the sea was illuminated with a glare as red as blood. The sudden flare came from the schooner's stern, where, by Morello's orders, a Coston light had been ignited. Nat had just time to see several figures with leveled rifles peering about for a sight of the boat when a bullet came singing by him. Another and another followed. But not one hit. Then the light died down and darkness fell once more.

Across the water they could hear voices on board the schooner distinctly.

"We'll never hit them by this kind of light," Dayton could be heard saying.

"Bah!" came Morello's response; "don't aim for them—aim for the boat and aim to sink it!"

Before either Nat or the captain had time to digest this alarming order another light flared up. Evidently the rascals had ransacked the locker in which the schooner's signaling appa-

tus was kept. This time it was a weird blue light that spread out upon the blackness of the night.

Following Morello's advice, the marksmen were now aiming for the boat itself. The bullets pattered like hail on the water about them. Suddenly there was a ripping sound and a shower of splinters flew about Nat, who was laboring gallantly at the oars.

"Apove der vater line," announced Captain Nelsen calmly. In the glare cast by the light the white wound on the gunwale of the boat could be seen distinctly.

"But it shows that they have our range," commented Nat. "The next one will do more damage."

The boy was right.

After a dozen more bullets had pattered about them, two missiles simultaneously pierced the side of the boat below the water line. The sea began to squirt in in two little fountains. But Captain Nelsen was prepared for just such an emergency. Pulling out his immense red bandanna handkerchief, he tore it into strips and plugged the holes.

A few seconds later the glare died down, and they were safe for the time being. Nat rowed desperately to get out of range before those on board the schooner could light another flare.

Whether he would have succeeded in this purpose, however, is destined not to be known. Hardly had the blue flare died out before the night was illuminated with an even more ghastly radiance. The lightning began a regular witch-dance to the westward of the schooner and the boat. It patterned the night sky like a bit of fine lacework.

It was well that they had that light by which to see and prepare for the peril that now menaced them. As it was, however, Captain Nelsen had barely time to shout a warning before another puff of the same hot wind as had assailed the schooner blew sharply over them. At the same instant Nat, looking up, espied coming toward the boat at a terrific pace what appeared to be a mountainous wall of white water. It roared as it came like a mighty waterfall.

All this, however, they had little time to note

before they were in the midst of the vortex of water. By sheer instinct Nat dropped his oars and clung to a thwart as the wave rushed down on them. The next instant he felt him himself borne down by a crushing weight of water. The breath was fairly jammed out of his body, while tons of green water seemed to be above, about, and on every side of him.

At last, sputtering and gasping, he emerged into air again. But things were not as they had been before the passing of the mighty wave. The boat was now full of water to her gunwales and had she not been fitted with air chambers would inevitably have gone to the bottom. Nat was immensely relieved to hear the captain's voice beside him.

"Yumping Yupiter!" gasped that doughtymariner, clinging to the side of the submerged craft, "dot must haf been der daddy of all der vaves. Undt now look oudt for here comes der vind."

Hardly had he spoken before the sea was lashed into sudden fury. In the darkness they could see the white caps all about them. Horri-

fied at this new calamity, Nat managed to shout out:

"Will the boat float?"

"Till der lasdt oldt cadt iss deadt," the captain assured him, in a hoarse shout; "as long as we can hold on we are all right."

"But we can't hold on indefinitely," objected Nat. "How long do you think this storm will last?"

"It is one of dose Basific storms," rejoined the captain, "dot don't last so very long. Maype dis be all over in an hour or so."

Fervently hoping that the captain might be correct, Nat took a firmer grip on the gunwale. The boat, thanks to her air chambers, rode buoyantly enough, and if they could but retain their grip of her they were in no great actual peril of drowning. But even if they rode out the storm, there was the question of food to be considered—and water, too. Truly their predicament seemed wretched. But desperate as it appeared, Nat found his thoughts wandering to the sapphire chest he had risked so much to recover.

Was it still in the boat, or had it been washed overboard when the storm wave overwhelmed them?

The lad was still cogitating this question when a shout from the captain startled him. He glanced up on the tossing and wind-torn sea and saw a strange sight.

Coming toward them on a tack that would bring her quite close to them was the schooner.

Even under half-bare poles as she was she seemed to be flying over the yeasty, tempest-torn seas. On and on she came, seeming to Nat's excited imagination, to be a hunted creature, pursued by the vengeance of the storm. It was as if nature, aroused by the misdeeds of the rascally crew the "Nettie Nelsen" now carried, was riding her down with the hounds of the wind and tempest.

CHAPTER X.

THE TIGERS OF THE SEA.

The storm-driven schooner drove past the swamped boat, with its two castaways clinging to it, in a smother of foam and spray. So fast was she traveling that hardly had her outlines loomed up before they were lost again in the darkness. Nat caught himself wondering if that night was to prove the last of the schooner's existence. But it may be stated here that the "Nettie Nelsen," staunch sea boat that she was, weathered the storm unharmed.

"Vell, here iss der vorst fix I voss ever in since I bin going py der sea."

It was Captain Nelsen who spoke, as a pallid and wild dawn broke over the raging sea, showing nothing but tossing whitecaps as far as the eye could reach. Overhead great torn ribbands of cloud were hurried by, their black outlines



The storm-driven schooner drove past the swamped boat, with its two castaways clinging to it.

macerated by the wind which was still blowing hard. But rough as the sea still was and strong as the wind remained, there was no doubt that the fury of the gale was over. In a short time it would have blown itself out.

This was encouraging to the castaways, but even with calm seas their position would still have been a desperate one. Adrift on the trackless Pacific, without food or fresh water, and so far as they knew, far from the line of travel of ships, the man and the boy clinging to the waterlogged boat were in about as bad a fix as can be imagined.

Nat, too, strong as he was, began to feel the strain. The long period he had gone without food, for he had tasted nothing since the meal which Hicks and Britt had brought him, was beginning to tell on him. Captain Nelsen's iron frame, however, inured to hardship and peril, was as vigorous as ever, or so it seemed.

As the wind began to moderate he cast his eyes about for something with which they might bale out the "Nettie Nelsen's" boat. He was particu-

larly anxious to get this task accomplished in order that they might have a sanctuary from danger which had just occurred to him. The thought of this new peril actually blanched the captain's weather-beaten cheeks, but a quick glance at Nat's worn countenance, white and lined with anxiety, told him that he had better not add to the strain on the lad by mentioning what had just crossed his mind.

The water was warm, fortunately, but even so Nat began to feel chilled and cold. This was partly due to the fact that he had taken no nourishment for so long a period. It was a symptom of exhaustion.

At length the sun rose, and as his rays gilded the tossing seas the wind began to die down till within a short time all trace of the storm had vanished. The sea grew smooth and the air hot. Captain Nelsen's first impulse was to look about for a sign of the "Nettie Nelsen," but not a trace of her was to be seen. She had vanished as utterly as the storm before which she was driving when they saw her last.

"Vell, dere vos some comfort in dot, anyhow," said the captain to himself; "dose murdering thieves von't get us even if der sharks——"

The sharks!

That was the peril of which Captain Nelsen had refrained speaking to Nat. As the above reflection crossed his mind, the honest German's eyes almost popped out of his head at the sight of something he perceived not far from the boat, moving aimlessly about on the now smooth water.

The object was a black triangular fin!

As he gazed it was joined by another and yet another, till there were six in all.

But at almost the same instant as the captain had sighted the sharks, Nat, who had been gazing down into the water which filled the boat in the hope of getting something to bale with, gave a cry of joy. In the bow, wedged in under a triangular brace, was a baling can belonging to the craft. And what to his eyes was almost as welcome a sight, farther back in the little craft and beneath a seat which had doubtless prevented it being washed overboard, was the sapphire chest.

Nat's drooping spirits were considerably revived by these two discoveries, and he greeted the captain, who had looked up at the lad's cry of delight, with a feeble cheer.

"Hooray, captain! Never say die! With that can we'll have the boat baled out before long and——"

He stopped short as he caught sight of the seaman's doleful expression.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "True, we are not out of troubles yet, but with a good boat under us."

"Dot iss idt," returned the captain from his side of the boat. "How voss vee to get der boat under us?"

"Bale her out, of course."

"Budt she is now on a lefel mit der vater. Vot is der use of baling. As fast as vee bale out der Bacifig he come in."

"By George, that's so," agreed Nat, immensely crestfallen; "but see here," he went on, with a sudden flash of inspiration, "it's only our weight that keeps her level with the water. Yours par-

ticularly. Why can't we let go for a few seconds and swim at the stern while I bale out a few canfuls?"

"Dot would be a goot idee if idt vossn't for vun ding," rejoined the captain, with a wry face.

"And that is?"

"Sharks!"

Nat shuddered as he heard the dread word.

"Sharks! Where?" he demanded.

"Here, there, undt everyveres," rejoined the German.

And now Nat saw what, but for his search for a baling can, he would have perceived earlier, and that was that the water about the boat was by this time fairly alive with the sea tigers. His heart sank with alarm and despondency. It seemed hard to be spared during the rigors of the storm only to meet this new and deadly danger.

"What are we to do, captain?"

"I don't know alretty," came the frank response. "Der only ding I can dink off is to get into der boat."

"Won't she sink?"

"No der air chambers will buoy her oop, budt at dot vee shan't be mooch bedder off."

"That's true," agreed Nat ruefully, "but in any event we shall be partially protected."

Acting on this idea, they clambered painfully into the boat; their limbs, however, were so stiff and cramped from their long immersion that this was a slow and tedious process.

It was accomplished at length, though, but their weight in the craft sank her even lower in the water so that they were almost waist deep in the sea as they clung to the thwarts.

The sharks had grown bolder, too, now. All about them they could see the flash of greeny-white bodies as the sea monsters slowly circled the boat, as if making up their minds from which side to attack it first.

"Beadt on der vater mit your hands," counselled the German. "Dose sharks iss pig cowards undt maype vee scare dem off for a vile."

Nat beat his hands furiously on the water, churning it into foam, and, as Captain Nelsen

had predicted, the sharks—even the boldest of them—sheered off. But it was only for a short time. They presently reappeared and seemed to be bolder than before.

Nat gazed at them with frank alarm, and Captain Nelsen was scarcely less perturbed. Although they both beat on the water now and made all the noise they could, the sharks seemed to be growing less and less afraid of them. Nat could almost see a contemptuous gleam in the creatures' piggy little eyes as they swam round the boat.

All at once one of them, seeming to tire of this aimless circling, made a sudden dash at the craft. Nat fairly shouted with alarm and perhaps his cry scared the creature off. At any rate, they were saved for that time, but it grew very evident that before long a moment would arrive when they could no longer hold the creatures at bay.

It was just then that the captain gave a shout.

"Idiotcy dot I voss," he yelled, so that Nat thought he had lost his mind under the stress of their situation; "idiotcy dot I voss. Dere is some-

dings in dis very boadt dot vill drive dose fellows away."

"What do you mean?" demanded the astonished Nat.

"Dot der last time dis boat vos used vos ven ve vos painting der ship sides. Ve didt not finish der chob before ve had to sail, undt a big can of acid vot vee use for cleaning off der oldt paint vos put in dot stern locker."

"In that box under the seat?" asked Nat excitedly, half guessing what the captain was driving at.

"Yah. Of you can reach it and der can is still dere, ve soon get riddt of der sharks. Ve poison der sea, by Yupiter."

"By pouring the acid into it!" cried Nat enthusiastically.

As he was the nearest to the stern of the submerged boat, it fell to him to open the locker and there, sure enough, was a big ten-gallon can of caustic acid. The boy dragged it out and extracted the cork. The pungent liquid was then poured on the waters about the boat.

Instantly the sea in the vicinity turned white as milk and they could see the sharks' bodies flash as they fled before the poisonous impregnation of the waters.

"Hooray!" shouted Nat, forgetting that even with the sharks gone they were almost in the same position as before, so far as hopelessness was concerned.

Almost at once, however, the realization overcame him. Adrift on the broad ocean, immersed to their waists in a sodden boat, what hope had they of rescue. In the extremity of his despair Nat groaned aloud. But his doleful exclamation was interrupted by the captain. That individual, who had been raising himself as high as he dared in the boat and gazing about over the sunlit, desolate waters, gave a sudden guttural shout, that was almost a scream:

"Look! Look!" he shouted, pointing. "Py yiminy, dere's a ship or I'm vun Dutchman!"

CHAPTER XI.

TRICKED!

Hardly willing to believe his ears lest the strain of disappointment should be too much for him in case the captain proved to be mistaken, Nat followed the direction of the excited mariner's pointing hand.

It was only by a severe effort of control that Nat saved himself from a collapse as he saw that it was not a case of a shipwrecked man's optical delusions.

Coming toward them from the eastern horizon was a craft of some sort. But she was, as yet, too far off to be made out as anything but a moving object. As she grew closer, however, it could be seen that she was without sails or funnel, and quite a small craft to be so far out at sea.

Nat, taking all this in with burning eyes, was

struck at the same time by something strangely familiar about the craft. As she came on, doubt deepened into certainty. In a voice that shook under his effort to render it steady, Nat gave an amazed shout:

“The ‘Nomad,’ by all that’s wonderful!”

“But will she see us?” This thought came on the top of his first glad recognition of the approaching craft. It was evident now that her course would bring the “Nomad”—or the vessel that Nat was sure he had recognized as her—past the castaways at some distance from them. They had no means of signaling and could not attract the attention of those on board. If, by any chance, she should go by without seeing them, Nat believed he should go mad. But to his joy as he and the captain in their half-sunken boat waved as hard as they dared, without disturbing the equilibrium of their craft, there came a puff of smoke and a sharp report from the bridge of the motor boat, where three figures could be seen.

It was a signal that they had been seen!

The "Nomad's" course was changed and she began to cut through the water directly for them, although of the surprise in store for them none of those on board Nat's craft was aware.

"Hoch der Kaiser, Nat!" shouted Captain Nelsen, in tremendous excitement. "Vee are safed, my poy! Vee are safed!"

"Donnerblitzen!" he exclaimed the next instant, for Nat, after breaking into a queer, trembly sort of smile and attempting to say something, had pitched forward, face down, in the water. For the first and last time in his life the overwrought boy had fainted.

Captain Nelsen reached forward his bulky form to pick Nat up, but as he did so, in the stress of the moment, he quite forgot the treacherous footing beneath him. His sudden movement caused the boat to lurch and in an instant he and Nat were struggling in the water—or rather it was the captain who was struggling, holding in his arms the inert form of the unconscious boy.

But luckily help was right at hand.

"Catch a line!" came a voice from above, as

the "Nomad" swept down on the two in the water.

At the same instant a rope with a running noose in it snaked through the air, thrown by Joe Hartley, at whose side was Ding-dong Bell, while Cal was close beside them. It was Joe, whose trick at the wheel it was, who had first sighted the drifting, submerged boat. How the Motor Rangers came to be in that part of the Pacific will be explained before long.

Captain Nelsen deftly caught the rope as Joe rang the engine room bell for "stop-reverse."

The captain was, of course, a total stranger to the boys and to Cal, and who the bedraggled boy might be whom he held in his arms they had no idea. All at once, however, as the captain adjusted the line about the boy's body, Nat's face was visible.

"It's Nat Trevor!" shrieked Ding-dong Bell, his hesitating English, as usual, leaving him under the stress of the moment.

"So it is. Great heavens, what can he be doing

here!" gasped Joe, his face a study in amazement and delight if ever there was one.

"Thank God, we've found him, lads," said Cal, reverently removing his sombrero, which he still insisted on wearing, even on board the "Nomad."

In less time than it takes to tell it both the captain and Nat were on board the gallant little motor craft, while an amazed ship's company gathered about them, all trying to talk at once. Captain Akers, who, after battling with the storm the night before, had been taking a nap below, was aroused by the hub-bub, and came on deck, and so did Sam Hinckley, who had been at the engines. So engrossed was everybody that the "Nomad," with her engines still reversed, was allowed to drift backward at her own sweet will.

The extraordinary recovery of the boy they believed to be either drowned, or in the hands of their relentless foes, temporarily deprived all hands of the power to do anything except exchange thunderstruck looks and exclamations.

Captain Akers lost no time, after the first stun-

ning shock of amazement had passed, in getting some restoratives from the medicine chest in the cabin. In the meantime, Sam Hinckley had recollected his duty and, diving swiftly below to his engines, had checked their retrograde movement. Therefore, till new sailing orders came, the "Nomad" lay motionless on the long swells, while they all clustered about Nat on the bridge.

As for Captain Nelsen, his rugged constitution speedily rallied from the ordeal through which he and the lad had passed, and thanks to the influence of Captain Akers' remedies it was not long before Nat, too, was sitting up alert and in full possession of his faculties.

Then came his story. With what enrapt attention it was heard may be better imagined by each reader than set down in cold type. The extraordinary tale thrilled them as had few happenings in their adventurous lives.

At length, after such numerous interruptions as you may imagine, Nat concluded his strange tale. Then came the question of what to do. Clearly the schooner was bound for some island

in the Marquesas Group—but just what spot of land was a question.

The only clew lay in Hicks's reference to the island of "Oh-dear-me." It was Captain Nelsen who solved the difficulty.

"Dot 'oh dear me' can be no odder island dan Odahmi," he said. "I know the place vell."

"What sort of a place is it?" asked Nat.

"Vell idt iss vun off der more remote islands of der group, undt ven I vos dere many years ago in a valer der vos nobody liffig on idt budt some natives."

"Then it is just the sort of place that Morello and his band would seek out," declared Joe. "They could lie snugly hid there for as long as they liked and emerge into the world at some distant date in comparative safety."

"Yes, if it wasn't for one thing," put in Captain Akers. "And that is that we happen to know their destination and can inform the authorities of it."

"That's so," agreed Nat, "but in the meantime

you haven't yet told us how you came to happen along so opportunely."

"That is easily told, Nat, and after your narrative will seem very tame," rejoined Joe. "It appears, then, that while Sam was asleep on board, those rascals, knowing that the 'Nomad' was a menace to them, cut her cable and set her adrift on the outgoing tide. When Sam awoke he was miles down the coast. He lost no time in navigating back, much mystified in the meantime as to what could have happened to set him adrift. Of course, as soon as he had met us and we all compared notes and examined the cut end of the cable, it was as clear as day. With the 'Nomad' once more in our possession, we decided to set out at once in search of you, hoping that by hook or crook when the schooner struck the boat you had managed to save yourself. By good luck, after weathering that terrific gale last night, we ran across you this morning, but it was a close shave I can tell you, for you formed so inconspicuous an object on the ocean that we came near missing you."

"Ach himmel!" exclaimed Captain Nelsen.

"And now," said Nat, with a smile, "as I see that Sam Hinckley has secured the boat to the 'Nomad' with a line, I will ask him to pull her in alongside. I've got something on board there that will interest you all."

Nat had purposely thus held back the news of the recovery of the treasure chest so as to give his companions a real surprise.

"Wh-h-h-h-hat can it be?" wondered Ding-dong.

"You'll soon see," said Nat, with a smile. "Now then," as Sam Hinckley drew the half-sunken boat alongside, "just oblige me by looking down into that boat and telling me what you see under the middle seat."

He paused with twinkling eyes and the air of a conjurer. The others eagerly enough lined up at the bridge rail and peered down overside. The interior of the boat was visible, as if seen through glass in the translucent water.

"Well?" said Nat smilingly, after a moment.

Joe drew a long breath.

"It—it—looks like the sapphire chest," he gasped. "Oh, Nat!"

The others merely looked their astonishment. In a few rapid words Nat supplied that part of the narrative of their escape dealing with the recovery of the chest, and which he had up to that moment purposely omitted.

"And now, boys," he concluded, "let's get a line over and hoist her on board. I, for one, am dying to feast my eyes on the sapphires once more and gloat over the way we've fooled those scoundrels of Morello's.

Sam Hinckley slipped over the side and soon made fast a turn around the box. How many pairs of willing hands hauled that box on board I leave you to imagine.

At last, dripping with water, there it stood on the bridge. They gathered about it half awesomely. There was something in its eventful history that gave pause to their somewhat noisy merriment. Silently they stood about, gazing with burning eyes while Nat fitted the key which

he still carried. The lock was a simple one of old-fashioned make, and opened easily.

The young Motor Ranger swung back the lid with a gesture.

There, spread out over its precious contents was the same bit of canvas that they had placed there before the treasure chest had been filched. Nat's pulses beat a bit faster as he raised one corner of the canvas and prepared to disclose once more to their view the wonderful contents that lay beneath.

He raised it with a sweeping gesture and an exclamation of triumph which changed midway to a shout of dismay.

The box contained no precious sapphire hoard!

In place of the gem-bearing rocks, which they had expected to meet their gaze, the group on the bridge stared into a box filled with old bits of iron ballast, ropes ends, damaged blocks, and other bits of marine odds and ends.

Colonel Morello had tricked them.

In the place of the blazing sapphires, the box held nothing but so much worthless old junk!

CHAPTER XII.

A MENACE OF OLD OCEAN.

"Gone!" exclaimed Joe Hartley, in a hollow voice.

"Ker-ker-ker-clean ger-ger-gone!" stuttered Ding-dong Bell.

"The scoundrels," ground out Captain Akers through clinched teeth.

All had some exclamation of anger or dismay to contribute. Such a completely dumfounded ship's company was never afloat on the Pacific, surely.

"I see it all now," burst out Nat suddenly, "Morello and Dayton could not trust even their own men, so they removed the sapphires from the chest and concealed them elsewhere, all the time leaving the chest in plain view so as to create the impression that all was open and above board.

Oh, the rascals! They cannot even be fair and square with their own associates."

The boy stopped short. He was overcome with chagrin at the thought that he had risked liberty and life for the sake of an utterly worthless chest.

For some time they could think or talk of nothing else. It was Captain Akers, who, with his good, solid common sense as usual to the fore, brought them up with a round turn.

"No use crying over what can't be helped, boys," he said briskly. "The question now is—what are we to do?"

"What indeed," repeated Joe, in a sadly puzzled tone.

Nat did not speak. Half crazy with mortification over the way in which he had been fooled he stood gazing out over the trackless void of the sunny Pacific.

"Well, my suggestion is this," said Captain Akers: "Let's take after the rascals."

"Pursue them!"

The exclamation came from Nat, and, although

it chimed in well enough with his wishes just then, somehow the blunt way in which the daring proposal had been made had startled him.

"That's the idea," rejoined Captain Akers, "we know where the beggars are bound for. Captain Nelsen and myself are both good navigators. We have plenty of gasolene on board, and, anyhow, if the worst comes to the worst, the 'Nomad' can proceed under sail. Come, what do you say?"

A long discussion followed, for what they were about to consider was not a project to be lightly rushed into. Perhaps if they had not been so wrought up over the discovery that the chest was empty, they would never have entertained the idea for an instant. But, in their then frame of mind, to overtake the rascals of Morello's band and deliver them over to justice was their chief and burning desire. It was Captain Nelsen then who clinched the argument by saying:

"Dere iss a French court of law, undt an American consul, in der Marquesas. Vee needt nodt take der madder into our own handts. Ledt us follow dose no-gooters oop undt ven vee logade

dem vee can communicate mit der authorisers. Vee both have haf a lodt to gain. I vant my stolen schooner back. In yust der same vay you vant your sapphiras.”

“Yy-y-you are n-n-n-no An-an-an-ananias when you say that,” struck in Ding-dong. “We certainly do want our sapphiras.”

And so the matter was decided. It was then high noon and the two captains both “shot the sun” with Captain Akers’ instruments and then the latter went to the cabin to work out their observations on the chart and lay a course for Odahmi. In the meantime, Sam Hinckley was ordered below to the engines and the “Nomad” was sent ahead on a direct westerly course till a proper one could be laid out.

Before starting, however, the boat, which had played such a prominent part in the escape of Nat and Captain Nelsen, was cut loose and allowed to go adrift. The “Nomad” carried a boat of her own, on davits, besides two collapsible ones, so that the little craft would have been of no use to her company.

With Joe at the wheel, and Ding-dong in the galley cooking up a hasty dinner, the start was made. But neither Nat nor Captain Nelsen heard the "go-ahead" bell ring, for they both, thoroughly exhausted by recent events, were sound asleep on two of the Pullman berths.

Some half an hour later Captain Akers had completed his final calculations and came on deck with instructions for the man at the wheel. As it so turned out, the course on which they had been sailing was not so very much out of the way of the corrected one, so that, after all, they had not lost much headway.

"At this rate, with decent luck, we ought to overhaul that schooner of yours before many days have passed," observed Captain Akers to Captain Nelsen that evening when they were all out on the deck after supper, enjoying the cool breeze that swept toward them from the westward.

"In that case what will we do?" wondered Nat; "board them and give them a fight?"

Captain Akers laughed.

"I'd like to, just as well as you boys would," he said; "but I don't know whether it would be a wise plan. No, my idea, if you don't mind hearing the suggestion of an old sailor, would be to reach the islands first and head the schooner off. In that case we can have a French gunboat—for the islands belong to the French—or, at least, some sort of a government craft on hand to give the rascals the welcome they deserve when they arrive."

"I ker-ker-can suggest a g-g-g-g-good—Phwit!—bit of jewelry for Colonel Morello if you wish to make him a gift when we meet again."

The remark came from Ding-dong whose trick it was at the wheel.

"Well?" asked Joe.

"A p-p-p-p-p-ppair of ster-ster-steel bub-bub-bracelets," rejoined Ding-dong in such a droll voice that they all had to laugh.

"Well, this has been a scorching day and no mistake," observed Captain Akers, when the laugh had subsided; "almost too sultry for these

latitudes at this time of year. I hope we are not in for a spell of more bad weather. 'The last time I looked at the barometer it puzzled me by the way it was acting.'

"How do you mean?" inquired Nat.

"Why, from my experience at sea I should say that it betokened the near presence of some remarkable phenomenon, such as frequently occur on the Pacific."

"There is a funny kind of feeling in the air for a fact," said Nat.

It had suddenly fallen a dead flat calm, and the "jiggle" of the "Nomad's" steadily working propeller was the only bit of motion observable on the unrippled ocean.

Captain Nelsen said nothing, but contented himself with gazing over toward the western horizon, where the sun was setting in a blaze of purple and gold magnificence.

"I don't like der look of dot sunset," he said presently; "it looks to me like——"

"Why, what's that thing away off there?" cried Joe, suddenly pointing toward the sunset.

They all looked in the direction he indicated and could make out plainly enough, against the glowing panorama, a queer, waving pillar of darkness. It looked like a long, thin cloud set on end.

As they gazed at it, it waved tremulously, and beyond the shadow of a doubt it grew larger.

"It looks like one of those dust devils we see at home, only a hundred times as large," said Joe.

Captain Akers, whose face had suddenly grown very grave, spoke up.

"That's just what it is, Joe," he said; "a huge dust devil. That thing yonder is a waterspout. It's coming this way. I hope it does not strike us or——"

He paused ominously.

"Or what?" asked Joe curiously.

"Or we may be in grave danger," concluded Captain Akers.

They all looked somewhat alarmed. Nat had read about waterspouts in the geography books, but he had never been at close quarters with the

strange columns of water stretching from sea to sky, and engulfing all that they encounter.

"Look! Look!" cried Joe suddenly. "There are more of them!"

"Good gracious, so there are," exclaimed Captain Akers, gazing anxiously to the westward.

Coming toward them, at a seemingly terrific rate, and spinning and dancing in a sort of gigantic witches' dance, were a dozen or more of the writhing, twisting water pillars.

A moaning sound filled the air, and it began to grow very dark suddenly.

Against the gathering curtain of blackness the ghastly forms of the huge waterspouts stood out menacingly.

If it had not been for their constant sinuous, snaky, undulating movements they might have been mistaken for the immense marble columns upholding the roof of a huge cathedral.

But these columns upheld the canopy of the sky, and found their nether resting place on the Pacific Ocean.

The boys' faces gleamed whitely in the heavy

dusk that had fallen as the witches' dance of the waterspouts grew closer. They could now see the waves boiling at their feet as the spouts sucked the water up into the sky. Would they manage to escape the waterspouts, or would the "Nomad" be trapped in their path?

Anxiously as they hung on the answer to the question, it was impossible of solution just then. But one thing was certain, not one of the party on board the motor cruiser had ever been in a situation of graver danger.

CHAPTER XIII.

ADRIFT.

All at once Joe uttered a shrill cry:

"That big fellow yonder. It's coming right for us."

"By dunder, dot's right," shouted Captain Nelsen, who, clutching the rail of the bridge, stood by the lad's side. "Hard over midt your helm dere, boy."

Joe spun the wheel over, but as he did so it suddenly turned loose in his hands.

A cry of consternation broke from his lips:

"The tiller ropes are broken!"

Nat echoed his comrade's alarmed shout. As for Ding-dong, he turned white under his tan.

The "Nomad" rolled helplessly in the trough of the now aroused seas, while at a distance of not more than a few hundred yards the nearest of the immense waterspouts was roaring down

upon her. For an instant they looked dismayed into the grim face of danger.

It looked as if there was not a chance of their escaping from being engulfed by the monster spout. In this emergency even Captain Akers stood irresolute. It was clear that he was non-plussed by the nearness of the peril.

Nat was the first to regain his wits.

"The saluting cannon—quick!"

He had recalled in a flash of inspiration having read in some book of voyages that a shot will sometimes shatter a waterspout.

He was by no means certain that it would work out in practice, but the plan in their present desperate situation was well worth trying, at all events.

The saluting cannon was bolted to the star-board side of the bridge. A full charge of powder, placed there when she had arrived in Santa Inez with the idea of firing a salute, was in place. All that was needed was some missile to ram home on top of it, for, of course, the charge was blank.



Nat aimed the weapon full at the advancing spout. Bang!
A red flash of flame split the gloom.



The chest with its collection of metal and wood odds and ends still lay close at hand. They had been too disgusted to touch it that afternoon. Right on top was a big slug of iron, which had been used on the "Nettie Nelsen" as a weight for the sounding line. It was the work of an instant with Nat to ram this home in the cannon and place a wad of canvas in on top of it.

The others watched him in silence. Only Captain Akers and Captain Nelsen had any idea of what he was after, and they deemed it more prudent to say nothing that might interrupt the lad.

The waterspout was now terribly near. Its roar was deafening and its mighty crest was hidden in an aurora of mist and spray. Big, angry waves rolled and tossed at its squirming base.

Swinging the cannon round on its pivot, Nat aimed the weapon full at the advancing spout. With a silent prayer he jerked the lanyard that fired the charge.

Bang!

A red flash of flame split the gloom as the missile sped.

"Hang on for your lives!" came simultaneously a shout from Captain Akers.

It was lucky for them that they took the advice. Down on their faces, clinging to the lowermost rail of the bridge, they all flung themselves, Joe leaving his useless wheel.

As the weight with which Nat had loaded the cannon struck the waterspout, shattering it as if it had been made of glass, the mighty structure broke in a gigantic cascade of water. To the boys, clinging with might and main to the rails, it appeared as if the bottom had fallen out of the heavens, letting down tons of green water. The force of the torrent drove the breath out of their bodies and choked and stunned them with its pressure. Beneath them they could feel the "Nomad" tremble from stem to stern at the shock. Mingling with the roar of the descending mass of fluid came a shout of dismay from Sam Hinckley at his engines.

In the emergency there had been no time to warn him. The firing of the gun had been the

first intimation he had received that anything unusual was going on forward.

He had started up the stairway from his engine room as he heard the sharp report, only to be met by an inundation of water that swept him backward among his engines, gasping, half drowned and with the clothes ripped almost off his back.

But despite all this, the "Nomad" had been saved by Nat's quick wit. The other waterspouts waltzed past her, roaring furiously, but not one of them touched her, and when, after they had passed, the semi-suffocated crew struggled to their feet and surveyed the havoc about them, the waterspouts were already some distance off, whirling eastward on their destructive course, surrounded by their gloomy pall of dusky cloud.

The sea behind them was white and angry, and upon it the "Nomad," crippled by her useless steering gear, bobbed about like an empty bottle. It was some time before her company recovered their wits sufficiently to take stock of what had happened. When they did, they could not

refrain from laughing at the ridiculous appearance they all presented, Sam Hinckley most of all.

The only garment left him was half a pair of trousers. The force of the wave had torn off the rest. Moreover, in the tumblefication in the engine room, a big can of black grease had torn loose and Sam, in his struggles, had come in contact with it, plentifully bedaubing himself with the inky stuff.

"We look like a lot of drowned rats," laughed Nat.

"And I f-f-f-f-f-f-feel like one," sputtered out Ding-dong ruefully.

"Well, get below and into dry clothes," ordered Captain Akers, "and then brew some good hot coffee. In the meantime we'll see what damage has been done and then get into dry togs, too."

The damage, on examination, proved to be serious enough. The "Nomad's" boat had been torn off her davits and only a few splinters suspended by the "falls" remained to show that she

had once hung there. A ventilator had also been smashed and a port light stove in.

"Thank goodness we've still got the portable boats," breathed Nat, "or we would be in a fix, indeed."

"That's so," agreed Captain Akers, "but as things are we must be thankful it isn't any worse. Any one of us might just as easily have had a limb broken as not."

"I guess the first thing to be done is to reeve a new tiller line," said Joe.

"Yes, indeed," agreed the captain. "We must be off our course now. Suppose you boys get to work at once at that, while Sam and I take stock of the engine room and get the pumps going. Sam says there is a foot of water in his domain."

The boys knew where the supplies were kept in a locker in the afterpart of the cockpit, and they soon had a new tiller rope adjusted. By this time Sam and Captain Akers had ascertained that the engines had sustained no damage but a short circuit of the ignition apparatus. It would

take some time to fix this, however, so it was decided to lay to for the night.

But on the anchor being lowered it was found that even by joining the longest cables on board together no bottom could be reached. They were in the deepest part of the Pacific Ocean. Miles of blue water lay under their keel. Infinite vastnesses of depth, almost unthinkable in their profundity.

The knowledge gave the boys a little shudder, but soon more practical thoughts ousted their mysterious feelings.

"What are we to do?" asked Joe. "If we don't anchor, we shall drift miles off our course."

"Why, let's up sail and take a spin under canvas for a while," said Captain Akers. "It will give us a chance to see how the 'Nomad' behaves under her auxiliary power."

This was voted an excellent plan, and accordingly, the masts were soon gotten out of their receptacles and the sections of which they were composed fitted together. Of itself this gave the "sticks" a rigid construction, but they were also

provided with steel wire stays, which, by means of turnbuckles, could be tautened like piano wires after they had been hooked into their places.

This done, all that remained was to hoist the canvas and get under way once more. The sails were two leg-of-mutton shaped canvases, with a small jib in the bow to balance the large after-sail.

"Donnervetter," exclaimed Captain Nelsen, when the sails were in place and began to "draw," "dis iss vere I am righdt at my home, by Yupiter. Idt feels a whole lot more natural to be under canvas dan sailing aroundt on a marine gasolene stove."

"In that case you can take the wheel," laughed Nat, "for I don't know a whole lot about steering a sailing vessel."

Accordingly, the captain assumed the helm, while the rest went below to give what help they could in overhauling the engines.

The captain hummed a merry old sea tune to himself as the sails filled and the "Nomad" began to forge ahead. By his side stood Cal Gif-

ford, whom we have rather lost sight of recently. The fact is, that Cal at sea was by no means so self-assertive a person as Cal ashore. The former stage driver had been suddenly plunged into, what was to him, an entirely novel and somewhat harrying existence.

The "Nomad," answering her helm like a race horse, made good headway, and in the meantime the party in the engine room labored unceasingly. At last all was declared in readiness to test the engine. But when Sam operated the mechanism that should have resulted in starting the motor they did no more than turn over lazily, with a sort of hoarse cough, and then stop dead.

Again and again he tried to start them, but they stubbornly resisted.

"Take a look at the carburetors," suggested Nat.

Sam bent over one of the brass mixing chambers and then looked up with an odd expression.

"Queer," he said; "no wonder the engines wouldn't start. No gasolene."

"No gasolene!" echoed Captain Akers. "We

must examine the tanks at once. There should be a supply enough to last for several weeks more."

"It can't have leaked out, or we'd have smelled it," said Joe.

"No," said Captain Akers, who looked rather worried, "the tanks are provided with out-board drains, so that in case of a leak no gasoline can get into the boat and cause an explosion."

A brief examination of the main tank served to confirm the fear which had already formed itself in Captain Akers' heart.

Through a big leak, caused where a seam had ripped open under the strain of the exploded waterspout, the precious driving fluid of the "Nomad" had nearly all escaped.

Worse still, the auxiliary tanks were also found to be almost emptied, their supply being fed by pressure into the main one. So large was the leak that scores of gallons had escaped into the sea by the time it was discovered.

"Then we are stuck without power to go ahead

or turn back!" exclaimed Nat, voicing the general dismay.

"If you don't count the sails, which are only good when the wind blows, I guess you have hit it right, lad," said Captain Akers, very soberly.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MYSTERIOUS CRAFT.

A more careful examination showed that they had not underestimated the seriousness of the loss of the motive fluid. Moreover, in reviewing the situation, it became apparent that unless they made for Honolulu, which port was still a great distance off, they would not be able to renew their supply.

Still more alarming was the prospect involving the food supply. Under power, as the "Nomad" had been provisioned for the voyage down the coast, they would have had enough and to spare. But depending on sail for driving them along it was doubtful if the provisions would last nearly all the distance.

In fact, after a consultation had been held in the cabin, they had to own, with what bitterness you may suppose, that the expedition must be

abandoned and a return for the California coast begun. Even at that, if they met contrary winds it might be days before they reached it.

The sleep of those on board the "Nomad" that night was broken and disturbed. Little was said after the decision to abandon the chase of the schooner had been reached. But how all felt about it could have been seen before they retired, by their gloomy countenances and voices. It was in truth a sad blow to them all. Even Cal, who, as has been said, had no great love for the water, took a keen interest in the object of the voyage, namely to bring the wrongdoers to book. He was heartily disgusted at this termination to all their plans. As for Sam Hinckley, the engineer, he sat in silence in his motionless, silent engine room, gloomily staring at his unmoving engines.

Such was the state of mind of all on board when, at dawn the next day, Joe Hartley, who was at the wheel, brought all hands up out of the cabin in all stages of dress and undress by a cry of:

"Sail ho!"

The "Nomad" was staggering along under her canvas, making a pretty picture, but gaining woe-fully few miles. Her build was not adapted for sailing and her progress was snail-like. At the rate she was going it might be weeks even before the coast was sighted.

The sail that Joe had seen was as yet some distance off, and, as well as could be made out, it was a schooner.

"What if she should be the 'Nettie Nelsen'?" wondered Nat.

"Well," rejoined Cal grimly, "I reckon we'd have nothing much to fear from those chaps in a fair fight. They're all right when they kin make use of treachery and deceit, but in a squar scrap they are no account. I reckon we proved that when the posse rounded 'em up in the canyon."

"That is so," agreed Nat, and in this opinion the others concurred. Just the same, it gave them queer little thrills to think that by a strange chance they might be coming to close quarters

with the men who had done them so many wrongs.

Breakfast was prepared by Ding-dong and despatched without their being any appreciable distance nearer to the strange schooner. But a short time after the meal a brisk breeze sprang up and the "Nomad" went staggering right gallantly along before it.

The schooner at the same time drew closer to her, both vessels sailing with the wind on what sailors call "the beam."

"She's noddt mein schooner, dot is a sure for certain fact," pronounced Captain Nelsen, after a prolonged scrutiny of the distant craft through his marine glasses.

"How do you know?" inquired Joe. "She looks almost exactly like her."

"Yah, but der 'Neddie Nelsen' had a green stripe round her bulwurks. Dis schooner has a vite line."

"Maybe they've changed the color. I've heard of such things being done."

The remark came from Captain Akers. Pres-

ently he took the glasses from Captain Nelsen and in his turn focused them on the oncoming schooner which seemed to be plunging along at a great rate.

"Well, dash my buttons, that's queer!" he exclaimed, after a minute or two of close observation. A puzzled look crept over his face as he spoke.

"What's queer?" inquired Nat.

"Why, I can't seem to see any one on her decks."

"Not even a man at the wheel?" asked Nat, in an astonished tone.

"No; not a soul. Here, you take the glasses and observe her. Your eyes are younger than mine."

With this he handed the binoculars to the boy. But Nat, and the others in their turn, were unable to spy any living being on the schooner's decks.

"There is some mystery of the sea there," decided Captain Akers. "In my opinion that ship has been abandoned for some good reason."

"But she is sailing along as if some hand were guiding her course," said Nat.

"That is true; but the helm may have been lashed before her crew skipped out. If that is the case with this slant of wind, she would naturally be sailing along as if all was well."

"Shall we board her and see what is the matter?" asked Nat eagerly.

"That will be a difficult and perhaps a dangerous task," was the response. "That schooner is going at quite a speed and if we ran alongside with the 'Nomad' she might run us down."

"Phew! Then we would be in a fix," exclaimed Joe. "I guess we'd better give her a wide berth."

"Look!" cried Cal suddenly, as the schooner, without diminishing her speed in the least, drew closer. "Look, what's the matter with her flag? It don't look natural, somehow."

The attention of all thus directed to the ensign, which hung at the vessel's peak, they could now see that it was upside down—a signal of distress the wide seas over.

“Good gracious!” exclaimed Captain Akers. “That puts a different complexion on the matter altogether. I begin to think that it may be our duty as Christian beings to board that craft. Perhaps her crew are suffering from some malady or affliction that has crippled them and they may be lying helpless below at this very moment.”

This was not an attractive picture, and Nat could not repress a feeling of depression as the schooner drew closer and they could take in her details. She was a black vessel of some hundred feet or more in length, with tapering spars and well-cut sails, and evidently possessed plenty of speed. Under her bowsprit they could now make out a gilded figure-head—the image of a woman apparently holding a trident aloft.

“The Island Queen!” read off Captain Akers, focusing his glasses on the vessel’s bow name board as she drew closer.

“She’s as preddy a liddle ship as der ‘Nettie Nelsen,’ almost,” pronounced Captain Nelsen.

“She is a fine schooner for a fact,” agreed Nat.

"I'd like to get on board her and penetrate the mystery of her desertion or disaster."

"M-m-m-m-m-maybe she's lul-lul-lul-leaking!"

The suggestion came, of course, from Dingdong.

"If she is, it's not as much as your parts of speech are," laughed Joe. "She's quite high out of the water."

Much more speculation of this sort was indulged in as the two vessels drew closer together.

They met and passed before Captain Akers had made up his mind whether or not to risk boarding her. But as they drew close, and the squeaking and straining of the schooner's blocks and rigging could be distinctly heard, there came a sudden sound from the mysterious vessel that struck a chill to all their hearts.

It was a long-drawn-out scream, uttered in what seemed to be a human voice, and yet was unlike any they had ever heard.

Again and again the terrible cry rang out, while they regarded each other with blanched faces.

What could it mean?

There was not a soul to be seen on her decks as the schooner swayed by, but the scream was terribly real and appealing.

Captain Akers was the first to recover his wits in the presence of this startling mystery.

"Boys," he exclaimed, looking round at them all with a determined air, "there's some terrible secret aboard that schooner, and I'm going to find out what it is if the Lord will let me. The wind's dropping now. In a short time I shouldn't wonder if it fell a dead calm. If it does, we can get out the collapsible boat and row over to her. Do you agree with me?"

"We certainly do," Nat answered for the rest in an agitated voice. "If there are some human beings in trouble on board that schooner, we'll do our best to help them, as Americans should do."

"That's the talk, boy. Now, Joe, put about and take after the schooner. I'm going below to overhaul my shooting-irons, for if we shan't have occasion to use them before long, my name isn't Tom Akers."

CHAPTER XV.

A FACE THAT TERRIFIED.

Before long, as the captain had foreseen, the wind decreased from the fresh breeze that had been blowing to a dead, glassy calm. The sea grew smooth and rippleless, while the sun shone down blistering on two becalmed vessels—the “Nomad” and the “Island Queen.”

The latter lay rolling in the swell at about half-a-mile's distance when the wind finally gave out altogether. Her sails flapped idly against her masts, and, neglected as they were, she looked the very picture of desolation.

The “Nomad” was run as close as possible to the becalmed vessel, but lack of wind compelled her, too, to come to a standstill at the distance mentioned. One of the collapsible boats was at once gotten out from under the cockpit floor and the sections, of which it was composed, clamped

together. Then it was hoisted on the davits upon which the boat, which had been swept away had hung, and dropped overboard.

An instant later Captain Akers, Nat, Joe, and Ding-dong Bell piled into it, leaving the rest on board the "Nomad." The three lads had been selected by the captain to accompany him, for, owing to the small size of the boat, it would have been impossible to accommodate more within her limited dimensions. Some disappointment was felt by the "stay-at-homes," but their work was cut out for them, too, as Captain Akers, before he left the ship, told them to be on the lookout with rifles, and in case any unforeseen things happened on the mysterious schooner to open fire on the attackers of the "Nomad" party.

For Captain Akers, for some reason or other, had quite made up his mind privately that they were going to meet with opposition in attempting to board the schooner. It was, therefore, somewhat of a shock to him when, after a long, hot pull, they reached the schooner's side to find that no human voice or presence opposed them.

The vessel rolled idly on the calm swells, without a sound to break the stillness all about her but the complaining of her sails and rigging. Nor after they had made fast the boat and boarded the vessel by the forechains did they encounter anything to give them pause.

The "Island Queen" seemed to be a typical craft of her kind. Flush decked with a white-painted galley forward right aft of the foremast and a commodious deck-house aft. Her decks were clean swept and showed no trace of disorder. Ropes were neatly coiled and everything seemed to be in apple-pie order.

"What can be the secret of this old derelict?" wondered Nat, in a subdued voice.

Somehow, since setting foot on the abandoned craft's decks, they had all felt constrained to speak in whispers. Even bluff Captain Akers was no exception to the general rule. There is something peculiarly impressive about treading the deck of an abandoned ship—a feeling both sinister and melancholy.

"Well," said Captain Akers, after he had

glanced rapidly but comprehensively about him, "the state of her decks proves conclusively that there was no bloody mutiny on board, as I had begun to think."

"Maybe we can find out something by entering the cabin," suggested Joe Hartley.

"An excellent idea, Joe," approved the captain. "Forward then and, boys, have your pistols ready for instant use. We may encounter nothing and we may run across something that will put us on our mettle."

With rather disturbed nerves, and pulses that beat faster than usual, the boys followed Captain Akers aft. The door of the deck-house was unlocked and swung on its hinges rhythmically as the ship swayed on the rise and fall of the bosom of the Pacific.

"You go first," whispered Joe, shoving Nat forward.

"Well, I like that——" began Nat indignantly, but neither of the boys was required to test his nerve by being the first to enter the place. Captain Akers spared them that.

With a quick, light step, the old seaman made his way within, followed by the awe-struck boys.

But if they had expected to see anything remarkable in the cabin, they were disappointed. It was an entirely ordinary place. In the center, a swinging table covered with a red cloth. A few books on navigation of the Pacific were stuck on a shelf in one corner. Two staterooms opened off it astern, evidently for the occupancy of the captain and mate. But an investigation of these yielded no more results than had their scrutiny of the outer cabin.

The bed clothes in the bunks were tumbled about as if the occupants had left hastily and several articles of clothing lay scattered about in the same helter-skelter fashion. But that was all.

"No use looking any further here," announced Captain Akers, after a thorough examination of the place had been made. "This cabin is just such a one as you might find on board any schooner plying this ocean. I guess we were fooling ourselves on the mystery part of this."

"How about those screams?" asked Nat quickly.

Captain Akers looked rather foolish.

"By Jove, I forgot those!" he exclaimed. "That's so, they were terrible cries, but for all that this schooner shows to the contrary; we must have dreamed we heard them. I think——"

"Look there!" cried Nat suddenly, seizing the captain's sleeve and pointing through a porthole, which looked out on the deck.

The captain looked, but could see nothing. He turned to the boy who seemed strangely excited and was pale and trembling.

"What was it?" he asked. "What did you see, Nat?"

"A face!" was the startling reply. "It was peering in through that porthole at us, but the instant I looked up it vanished."

"Was it a man's face?" asked Captain Akers, deeply interested. The others were off at another part of the cabin and Nat was glad, for he did not wish them to hear the alarming intelligence.

"Yes, it was a man's face, as well as I can describe it. But it was a terrible one. It was hairy and had two little beady eyes set deep in it that glinted with hate as they looked at us. Who could it have been?"

"Well, my hearty, we'll soon find out. I'm a plain sailor and don't like mystery. I'm going to get to the bottom of this. Where did you say the skulker was—outside that port? Then it ought to be easy to find him."

With this, and with Nat close at his heels, he dashed out of the cabin on to the deck.

But to their utter astonishment the schooner looked just as before. No human figure could be seen crouching behind some obstruction and peering at the intruders.

Nor could they find any tracks under the port through which Nat was positive he had seen the formidable face peering.

Who, then, could it have been? And where had he concealed himself?

The forward deck-house was the place that naturally suggested itself to them. Led by the cap-

tain, the two young adventurers started for the small white structure.

"Whoever you are, my man," exclaimed the captain, as he laid hand on the door and thrust it open, "don't dare to try any monkey tricks with us. We'll stand for no nonsense and are armed."

With these words he pushed open the door. But the place, which was evidently a kind of galley—or cook house—combined with sleeping accommodations of a rough character, was empty. A rusty sea-range with pots and pans still on it stretched along the forward end, and cooking materials stood all about. A big barrel of rolled oats, with the top off, stood half open.

"Hullo!" exclaimed the captain, as he gazed into it, "some one's dipped into this lately."

So much was clear. The contents of the barrel had evidently been disturbed by somebody helping himself; but who?

As he propounded the question to himself, Nat looked up, and almost gave way to a shrill cry of alarm as he did so.

There was a small, square, unglazed window above the stove—apparently put there for ventilation.

In this aperture as he glanced up he had, for the second time, encountered the terrible hairy face gazing in at them. But as his eyes met the bright, shifty orbs the visage vanished, and when the others looked up the window was empty.

It was the work of but one second for Nat to dash out of the cook house. But swift as he was the mysterious eavesdropper was quicker. He must have vanished with the celerity of a Jack-in-the-box, for when Nat gained the deck not a trace of anything unusual was to be seen.

"Say, this thing is getting on my nerves," the lad exclaimed, as the others joined him and he concluded his description of the second appearance of the grim face.

"I don't blame you, my boy," rejoined Captain Akers. "Seriously, if I was as superstitious as some seamen, I'd say that this craft was haunted. There hardly seems to be any other explanation for it."

"Except that disturbed oat barrel," put in Joe uneasily.

"That's just it," responded the captain; "that makes it look as if something human was on board. But in that case why should they avoid us and play such pranks as have just occurred. I don't understand it and I don't half like it. Let's have a look at the cargo—there may be something we require in it—and then I suggest that we make the best of our way back to the 'Nomad.' "

The boys agreed heartily and watched with some interest while Captain Akers removed the cover of the forward hatch. As the battens were lifted off a strange, familiar smell assailed their nostrils, but before either of the boys could speak Captain Akers gave a cry of astonishment.

"Case oil! Kerosene!" he cried. "Hoor-ay, boys! This is the greatest discovery of the age. We can run the engine of the 'Nomad' now till further orders."

"Three cheers!" shouted Nat, fairly forgetting in the joy of this great discovery the gloom which

the mystery of the schooner "Island Queen" had cast over him.

Joe Hartley joined with a will in the jubilation. It would have been a queer sight if any one could have been looking on to see those three—the grizzled seaman and the bright-faced boys—capering about like lunatics in their joy at the discovery.

But in the midst of their jubilation they received a sudden check. Captain Akers had be-thought himself to look for the "Nomad."

A cry of consternation now rose to his lips and was echoed by the boys as they ascertained its cause.

The "Nomad" had vanished.

They were alone in mid-Pacific on the mysterious schooner!

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT BEFELL IN THE FOG.

Captain Akers was the first to find a solution of the mystery.

“Fog!” he exclaimed.

Sure enough they now perceived, as they would have before had they not been too engrossed with their investigations, that a white smother was creeping up, enveloping sea and sky in its all-embracing obscurity. The mist had already blotted out the “Nomad” from view and was now rolling down like clouds of white steam upon the schooner. In a few moments they would be enveloped in it.

“This is the worst predicament yet!” cried Nat, as it dawned upon him that to think of returning to the “Nomad” in such a smother would be impossible.

As for Joe, he stood silent. More alarmed,

though, than he cared to admit, Captain Akers fingered his beard thoughtfully.

"Nothing's so bad but it might be worse," he said soberly, "and if this fog will only lift within a reasonable time we may yet be all right."

"Yes, if the 'Nomad' will only stay in her present position," said Nat, "but the great Pacific Drift sets in hereabouts and there is a strong chance that if we are caught in it the two vessels may be drifted far asunder by the time the mists lift."

"That is so," admitted Captain Akers, "and it is too deep to anchor, confound it! Suppose we try shouting to them. Maybe they can catch our hail, although with the atmosphere so dense, I doubt it."

"It's worth trying," opined Nat, and then they all three placed their hands funnelwise to their mouths and set up a loud cry.

"No-o-o-om-a-a-a-a-a-d a-hoy!"

But, although they shouted till their voices were cracked, they could catch no response.

The fog had shut down so thickly now that it

was impossible to see the forward part of the deck from amidships where they stood. It was truly, as Nat had said, "the worst yet!" but they pluckily set to work to make the best of it.

"After all," said Nat, "it might be far worse. We've got a good ship under our feet and a comfortable cabin to retire to. There are provisions in plenty, and if the worst comes to the worst we can live for quite a time."

"Yes, and there's water, too," put in Captain Akers, more hopefully. "I squinted into the scuttle butt when we went by it and saw that it was full of water. I tasted it and it seemed quite sweet and palatable."

"Well, then," said Joe philosophically, "the only thing to do is to make the best of it."

"That's the talk, Joe," came approvingly from Nat.

"And now," said Captain Akers, "suppose Joe that you cook us a meal. I guess we can all stand some food, and it will enable us to face whatever is to come with better courage, if we have plenty of nourishment."

"A good idea, captain," said Nat, "and if you don't mind I've got a suggestion to make."

"Make it, my lad."

"Why not put some provisions and water in the small boat? We never know what might happen, and it would be a good thing in case we had to abandon the 'Island Queen' to have the boat stocked with food and water."

"You're a good, foresighted lad," approved the captain. "It might not be a bad idea to do that first. I noticed a small water keg on the cabin house aft. We'll fill that and lower it and then follow it up with some canned stuff."

"I'll move the boat from the side to the stern," volunteered Nat, "while you and Joe select some suitable stuff to provision her with."

"Very well, my boy."

And so it came about that, thanks to Nat's foresight, the boat was stocked with food and water, a fact which was to be of signal benefit to at least one of the party later on, although, of course, as they could not look into the future, not one of them guessed this.

This work done, Joe bore an armful of canned goods, potatoes and onions to the cook house. Wood and coal were handy in a bin and he soon had a roaring fire going in the stove. While he was at this work Nat and Captain Akers investigated the cabin once more, but without lighting on any solution of the mystery of the "Island Queen's" abandonment.

"I reckon it will prove one of those mysteries of the Pacific," said the captain. "There are lots of them every year, and few of them get into the papers. For instance, there was that Chinese junk that——"

"Help! Help!"

The cry came from forward.

"It's Joe's voice!" shouted Nat. "He's in trouble."

Seizing up his pistol which he had laid down, Captain Akers was after the boy, who had hastened forward in two bounds.

Joe met them, bouncing out of the fog, with a white face.

"Nat! Nat!" he cried in a scared voice. "He's at it again!"

"Who?" exclaimed Nat.

"What?" demanded the captain, his whiskers bristling angrily.

"Why, that sailor, or ghost, or whatever it is, that Nat saw. I had just peeled my potatoes and set them in a pan near the window and turned my back for an instant when he, or it, or that, showed up. I had hardly turned before I heard a slight noise behind me. I switched round and saw a big arm reaching through that window.

"Evidently its object was to steal some potatoes. I shouted, but, instead of running away, the fellow grabbed up the whole pan and threw it at me. I was too mad to be scared and ran outside to grab him and ask him what he meant by such conduct. But when I got there the rascal had gone."

"Just the same trick he played every time *I* saw him," cried Nat. "What on earth can it all mean? Do you think that there is a lunatic on board this craft, captain?"

"I don't know what to think, my boy," rejoined the captain seriously. "Some things are beyond human comprehension, and this is one of them. If we have to spend the night on the craft, I'm thinking we had better keep a strict watch, however."

"So do I," agreed Nat. "This has gone past any joking stage. It's up to us to find out who this rascal is, and what he means by playing such pranks."

"And what those screams meant, too," said the captain.

"Yes," chimed in Joe quaveringly. "The recollection of them makes me feel bad. They were the most blood-curdling cries I ever heard."

"They were that, my boy," agreed the captain, "but I am now convinced that they did not come from anybody else's throat but the ill-favored wind-pipe of this fellow who is putting up all these pranks."

"But we've looked all over the ship, in every place in which he could hide," protested Nat, "and

not found a trace of him. How do you account for that?"

"Great Scott!" groaned the captain. "I don't pretend to account for it or anything else on this extraordinary ship—I just give it up."

With this, Joe, with Nat for company, went back to his cooking. Dinner was prepared and eaten without any recurrence of the events that had so puzzled and mystified them. Darkness fell with the fog still hanging thick and dank; but they made it all snug in the cabin by lighting the hanging lamp, which cast a cheerful glow.

They wondered what was transpiring on board the "Nomad" at that hour and many guesses were made as to whether or no they had been caught in the Pacific Drift. From this the talk shifted to tales of the South Pacific Islands, amid which the captain had cruised when young. He had many interesting tales to tell of them and of the manners and customs of their natives.

It was in the midst of one of his most exciting narrations that something happened that brought

them all to their feet with bounding pulses and thickly beating hearts.

From without had come distinctly the deep-toned notes of a bell!

As they stood listening, the dismal tolling recommenced. There was something uncanny and ghastly about it, coming, as it did, on board that mysterious craft.

The chime was rung out in slow, funeral style. Boom-boom! Boom-boom!

Nat shuddered as he listened. What could it mean? He determined to find out.

Captain Akers already had the door open and stood peering forth. The fog hung, dark and dripping, all about them. One could hardly see ten paces away. But, as well as they could judge, the tolling came from the decks of the "Island Queen" herself.

"It's that ship's bell!" cried Nat. "I noticed one forward this afternoon."

As he spoke the character of the ringing changed.

The bell began to peal fast and furiously. Its

clangor deafened and terrified. It sounded as if a madman had hold of the clapper string and was trying to deafen any one within hearing.

"Come on!" shouted the captain; "that's another of the rascal's tricks to scare us. We'll catch him at it this time, though, and when we do——"

He left the grim threat unfinished, as, pistol in hand, he started forward through the fog. Close on his heels came the boys, their hearts beating entirely too fast for comfort.

As they started forward the ringing ceased as abruptly as it had begun.

"That won't save you, you coward!" roared the captain into the fog. "Come on out, like a man, and face the music. Come on, you hound, and take your lesson."

But, when, within one second's time, they reached the bell which was hung just forward of the foremast, there was nobody to be seen!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE "ISLAND QUEEN'S" SECRET.

Well, I will leave you to imagine for yourselves just how the boys looked and felt and acted at this amazing discovery.

They were baffled, mystified, and, to tell the truth, not a little alarmed.

A human enemy they would not have feared. But in the darkness, with the moisture from the fog dripping in a melancholy fashion on the deck, the near presence of the supernatural—for such was the only conclusion left—was, to say the least, disquieting.

While they still stood there, gazing at each other through the fog, with blank astonishment depicted on their faces, their nerves were put to a still further test.

The same sharp scream which had echoed from the uncanny vessel as she drifted by the "No-

mad," of which they had since spoken with what effect we know, sounded once more.

This time it seemed to proceed from above them.

From some point high up in the mist-laden air.

Shrill and terrible it rang out. Their blood was fairly chilled with horror.

What could it mean?

Nat was far too sensible a lad to believe in ghosts. So, too, was Joe. As for Captain Akers, he was superior to most seamen in the matter of superstition, but he gave it now as his unalterable conviction that the "Island Queen" was haunted.

This was by no means a comfortable idea. After some further search—although they surmised beforehand it would be fruitless—the adventurers made their way back to the cabin, sadly puzzled and not a little confused.

After that one long scream from the upper regions dead silence had fallen. It was disturbed only by the doleful drip-drip of the fog moisture from the rigging.

"Well, boys," said the captain, as they reëntered the cabin, "I, for one, ain't sorry to be back where there's light and comfort. This thing is becoming too much for me and I'm willing to own that I'm beat by it. Any one got any suggestions?"

Nobody had. Soon after they turned in, as, despite their uneasiness, all were tired out by the exciting events of the day. Nat volunteered to take the first watch, it being arranged that at midnight he was to awaken Captain Akers, who would relieve him.

The lad took up his station by the door where the steady breathing of the others soon apprised him that they had passed into slumberland. It was an eerie sensation sitting there, looking out on the fog-laden night and speculating—for, try as he would, Nat could not help doing so—on the nature of the invader who had so sadly disturbed them.

He had his rifle in his hands and determined to keep bright and wide awake, so that if anything occurred which might have a bearing on the

mystery he would be able to solve it. Just how long he had sat there before something happened to break the monotony Nat did not know. It might have been an hour or it might have been two. But he had noticed that the fog was beginning to lift when at the same instant he perceived a shadowy form come creeping along the decks, making toward the stern.

The figure was bent almost double and swung two long arms as it advanced. After his first gasp of surprise, Nat noted that the newcomer was unarmed. This thought gave him new courage and, slipping within the shadow of the door, he watched the figure's advance.

But, whatever its mission, it did not apparently mean harm to the occupants of the cabin, for, after a brief pause near there, it kept right on to the stern.

As it passed Nat slipped out of his place of concealment and took after it, treading softly the while, so as not to alarm the marauder. He was curious to see what the fellow was up to,

When he did make out Nat was seized with a sudden fury and sprang forward.

The figure, after advancing right up to the stern-rail, could be seen, in the now clearing atmosphere, to be fumbling with something.

"Great Ginger! He's casting our boat loose!" gasped Nat.

As he made this discovery the boy was too engrossed to notice that a puff of wind came over the water. In their activity, since they had been on board, not one of them had thought to lower the schooner's sails. She heeled to the wind which momentarily grew steadier and forged gently ahead. But of all this Nat—to his cost, as we shall see later—was oblivious.

The discovery he had made of the nefarious work the mysterious inhabitant of the schooner was about had aroused his rage.

With an angry shout, he sprang forward, rifle in hand, toward the midnight skulker.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded, with an angry inflection in his voice.

Then, as the figure switched around, he added, leveling his rifle:

"Throw up your hands and don't dare to move. I've caught you at last."

But, to his surprise, instead of remaining still, the figure made a swift dash for him. Before he could make a move Nat, caught quite off his guard, for he had not dreamed of opposition, found the rifle whisked from his hands by a herculean grasp and hurled overside.

The next instant those mighty arms had encircled Nat himself.

The lad, despite his strength and activity, was a child in that grip of steel.

He felt himself helplessly snatched from his feet and the breath crushed out of his body.

This stifled his agonized cry for help.

In one dreadful flash of insight he saw that the creature which now held him was hairy, unclothed, and ferocious to a degree. But while he still perceived this subconsciously, struggling vainly to free himself, his captor made a rush for the rail of the schooner.

The next instant Nat felt himself hurtling through the air, uttering a choked cry.

But his shout was drowned as the water closed above his head. His last recollection, as he sank, was of a shrill and terrible cry mingling with and overpowering his own appeal. It was the same cry that they had heard twice before, and, for a third time, in the air above them.

Nat, who was a strong and self-possessed swimmer, came to the surface almost at once after his submersion and at once looked about for the schooner. But, to his horror, he now saw what he had not observed before, and that was that the vessel was moving quite smartly through the water.

"Help! Help! Help!" shouted Nat, treading water.

But his cry was unheard.

In a perfect agony of fear and apprehension as to his future fate, he watched the schooner slip off into the now light-hanging mist and vanish!

The boy was alone in the Pacific solitude with nothing but his own strength to rely on, and Nat

knew that long before he could be picked up his powers would have been exhausted. It was the most trying moment of all his life, and Nat, as we know, had faced grave perils in his career.

But the young Motor Ranger was in a position in which thinking could accomplish nothing—action was the thing.

Treading water, so as to conserve all his strength, he looked about him. For a brief interval he had cherished a hope that he might catch a glimpse of the "Nomad" in the now clearing atmosphere. But this hope proved to be a chimera. No trace of the power cruiser was to be seen.

Nat gave a low groan.

"I don't see what is going to become of me," he thought. "If assistance does not soon arrive from some quarter, it will be too late. And yet where can I look for aid? Captain Akers, and Joe, are both sound sleepers. Unless that monster should attack them, they may not awaken till daylight. By that time my body will be at the bottom of the Pacific."

The boy gave way entirely to his gloomy forebodings. And there was a good excuse for Nat's apprehension. A swimmer's endurance is not unlimited. He had never tested his powers to the uttermost in the water, but he was pretty sure that if he was still on the surface when day broke that he would be singularly fortunate.

Suddenly something bumped against the lad in the darkness.

Nat gave a cry half of alarm. For one instant he thought of sharks and all that an attack by those ferocious monsters would mean.

The next instant, however, he realized that what had bumped him in the darkness was nothing more nor less than a largish stick of timber. Apparently it had once been a spar on some castaway vessel. But whatever its past history, Nat hailed it with joy. Seizing on it, he buoyed himself up and felt greatly relieved, both mentally and physically. With this support under him, he could remain on the surface much longer than would otherwise have been possible. His spirits rose. Perhaps, after all, he would be saved. The

coming of the bit of wood had seemed providential, but Nat, looking about him, now perceived that its coming was not so accidental as it had seemed. The water all about him was thickly strewn with logs and boxes and barrels.

Seemingly he was in some sort of current which had attracted all this miscellaneous flotsam.

All at once the solution occurred to him.

The great Pacific Drift!

He was on the bosom of that mysterious current. This could scarcely be doubted. But the thought brought with it a dismal sense of isolation and depression.

Ships steered clear of the Drift. There was too much debris floating on its surface to suit them.

That being the case he stood still less of a chance of attracting the attention of some vessel than he had first hoped.

With such unpleasant thoughts to bear him company, Nat passed the night away, clinging to his friendly log. It was to its timely arrival that

he owed the fact that he was on the surface of the ocean instead of being drowned from exhaustion.

The sun rose on an unclouded expanse of sea. The water shone as bluely under the rays of the luminary as did the sky. A burning, intense steel-like blue.

Nat, casting despairingly about for a sail, or the sign of a ship, could meet with nothing to mar the desolate monotony of the ocean wastes. He seemed to be alone on the wide, spreading waters.

As the sun rose higher it grew hotter. All the world seemed to be on fire. The heat burned the salt into Nat's drenched skin and caused him excruciating pain.

By noon the lad, suffering intensely for lack of water, was half delirious. Floating out there in the broad Pacific on a weed-grown, barnacled log, he babbled of green shady groves and running mountain streams.

He heard his voice rattling on in its delirium

with the detached interest of a person listening to somebody else.

Yet he knew it was himself talking in that rambling, foolish way.

"I must be going crazy!" he gasped. "Oh, heaven! for one drop of cold water."

He raised his eyes and beheld, coming toward him, something that almost made him release his grip of the log from sheer astonishment.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LOST ON THE WESTERN SEA.

Not a hundred yards from him, and bobbing gently up and down on the long swells, was a small boat.

"If I can only get on board her, I'll be far better off than I would be here," muttered Nat to himself.

He kicked out vigorously and was soon alongside the drifting shallop. There was something strangely familiar about her looks to him. As he climbed on board her, by way of the stern, he soon saw why.

It was the collapsible boat which they had put overboard from the "Nomad" and the same one which he had detected the mysterious enemy of the "Island Queen" in the very act of casting loose. Seemingly that individual had achieved his malicious purpose and the boat, caught in the

Pacific Drift, had slowly been drawn along in the mile-wide current of debris and flotsam. The chance was a providential one for Nat, at all events.

As will be recalled, the boat had been stocked up with provisions and a water keg put on board by the party marooned on the mysterious schooner. The first thing Nat made for was that keg. It was the work of an instant to turn the spigot and place his mouth to the refreshing stream that gushed forth. True, the water was warm, almost hot, in fact, but to Nat no nectar, brewed on high Olympus itself, could have tasted more delicious. He drank and then paused for breath and then, applying himself afresh to the spigot, he drank again.

The boy kept this up till his thirst was fully quenched, and then he turned his attention to the eatables. Luckily all the canned stuff was fitted with patent keys, so that no can opener was needed. The bag of ships biscuit contained all that was wanted in the way of bread. Nat

thought, as he ate, that he had never tasted a more delicious meal.

When he had finished he gave a sigh of repletion and looked about him. The sea was still as empty as the sky. But the sun had sunk lower and the heat was not so intense.

As he gazed about him, over that vast, lonely expanse, Nat's apprehensions—lulled for a time—returned tenfold. If he was not picked up, what would become of him?

He shuddered as he realized what his fate was likely to be. When his food and water were exhausted he would drift till death overtook him. Perhaps months, and maybe years, afterward his body, dried by the heat, would be found adrift on the Pacific and form another of those "ocean mysteries," of which Captain Akers had told.

The thought was not a cheerful one and Nat tried to busy his mind with other thoughts. What were they doing on board the "Nomad"? What would they be thinking on the schooner? What of the mysterious man, of giant strength, to

whose vindictive action he owed all his present trouble?

"It's a queer situation all around," thought Nat. "Here am I on the ocean in a rowboat. Joe and Captain Akers are marooned on a schooner, filled with mystery, and the 'Nomad' is crippled and drifting about some place, under sail. Shall we ever all meet again, I wonder?"

So the afternoon passed and the sun grew lower and set. Night rushed down over the sea with all the swiftness characteristic of those latitudes. Nat, his head sunk in his hands, allowed his boat to drift. He had oars, but, he felt, what was the use of using them? One way was the same as another to him in his predicament. Let the boat drift at her will.

But by and by the darkness and the inaction got on his nerves. Picking up the oars, he fell to work feverishly, trying to forget his troubles in the work. The boat fairly cut along. For some hours he kept this up and then, worn out, he cast himself on the bottom of his craft and sank into a deep sleep.

He was awakened by a sharp tug at his sleeve. Starting up, Nat heard the loud swish of wings. In the darkness he could dimly make out a huge, winged form making off through the air.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed, with a shudder, "that was some bird of prey that concluded that I was dead. It was about to make a meal off me if I had not moved."

Nat shook nervously as he realized that, if some way was not found out of his predicament before long, he would in very truth be food for just such birds.

The thought bestirred him to action. He sat bolt upright and gazed about him. But nothing that he could perceive within his limited radius of view appeared to give him hope. The night was as silent as the sea. Overhead the stars burned steadily and with a soft intensity not seen in the east.

As he gazed up at them a sudden thought was born in Nat's brain. He threw himself on his knees on the bottom of the boat and, clasping his hands, he besought his Maker to look down in pity

upon him. His heart seemed lightened as he prayed.

When he had finished he looked about him once more. At first everything seemed to be the same as when he had withdrawn his gaze; but, after a minute, he perceived that on the far-distant horizon something unusual was showing.

A dull, red glow.

As he gazed it grew brighter and spread till it seemed to light up the whole sky. The atmosphere burned blood-red with the light.

"A ship on fire!" thought Nat.

Then came the idea:

"If so, some of her crew have likely escaped and taken to the boats. I'll row over toward them. They say 'misery loves company.' I'm sure I shall be glad to fall in with any one to whom I can talk and who can possibly guide me to some place of safety."

So thinking, Nat fell to his oars and began pulling, with might and main, for the distant glow.

But distances at sea are deceptive. It seemed

to him he had pulled at least five miles when he gave a second glance over his shoulder at the fiery sky.

To his disappointment, the blaze seemed to be as far off as ever. Nat knew, however, that this could not be the case, and, bending to his oars once more, he pluckily pulled onward. He was rewarded, in a few minutes, by finding the light growing visibly stronger and the blaze closer to hand.

As yet, however, he had seen no boats, nor traces of refugees from the burning ship—such as he surmised the glow must be caused by.

“Maybe they are all waiting near by to see the last of their vessel,” thought Nat. “In that case I must hurry up or she’ll have burned to the water’s edge before I arrive.”

But when Nat had drawn quite close the blaze was still burning fiercely. The flames were shooting up skyward, dimming the stars and making a grand spectacle. Fountains of sparks soared heavenward as every now and then some beam subsided with a crash. Nat could hear the hiss-

ing of the water as charred embers fell overboard.

What rig the vessel had been was, of course, impossible for the boy to make out, for when he arrived within a short distance of her she was already burned down to a mere hulk. Her masts and upper works had vanished some time before, a prey to the savage flames.

All at once a hail came across the waters.

"Boat ahoy!"

To Nat it seemed that he must be in a dream. It could not be possible that the voice he heard was Joe Hartley's, and yet it was mighty familiar.

Again came the hail. This time there was no question about it. It *was* Joe, though how he happened to be there Nat had no idea. Half stunned by astonishment, he hailed back:

"Joe—old fellow— is it really you!"

"Sure enough, Nat," cried the voice, while a cheer, given in hearty American style, rang out over the crimsoned waters.

At the same instant, from the midst of the

intense glare, which had hitherto prevented Nat from seeing any distance, glided the well-known form of the "Nomad." Nat came near fainting a second time from sheer surprise as he saw her, for the power-craft was not under sail, but came gliding swiftly on, evidently running under motor power.

Ten minutes later he was on board and after a perfect tempest of congratulations, handshakings and questions had been bandied about, Joe explained it all.

After Nat had been missed from the "Island Queen," they naturally suffered most intense anxiety on his behalf. What made it all the more puzzling was that the boat was missing also. But right then they had troubles of their own on hand as well as Nat's strange disappearance. It will be recalled that the two were asleep when Nat was hurled overboard from the schooner and they did not—as Nat had surmised would be the case—awaken till some time later.

When they did so it was to find Nat gone and

the schooner staggering along, at a lively gait, under all sail. Luckily Captain Akers recalled that he had seen some navigating instruments in the cabin of the "Island Queen." As the bearings of the "Nomad" had been taken the day before, it was a simple matter by figuring out their then position to sail the schooner back to where they had left her—simple, that is, so far as the mathematical part of the proposition went.

But the "sailor part" of it was different. Luckily, however, the wind did not increase in violence and, leaving the helm to Joe, Captain Akers managed to get the vessel about. To their huge delight, they found that the good sense of Captain Nelsen had prevented the "Nomad" being moved in search of them, as had been the wish of the others left on board. Captain Nelsen, however, had argued that they had better stop right in that position, or as nearly so as possible, in case Captain Akers did find—as proved to be the case—his way back again.

The "Nomad" and the schooner were then

coupled together by means of grappling irons and amid general rejoicing—which was sadly marred by the news of Nat's vanishment—the work of transferring her cargo of kerosene to the "Nomad" was begun. While it went on Sam Hinckley, skillfully mended up the fuel tanks and, after they were declared tight, they were filled. The engine was started and was found to work perfectly on the stuff, as, in fact, the builders had assured Captain Akers it would.

"So there we were, all ready to go onward once more, but without you we could not and would not proceed," said Joe, throwing his arm about Nat's shoulders as the latter sat beside him on the "Nomad's" bridge, the glow of the fire still lighting up the scene.

"But, Joe," exclaimed Nat, "you haven't yet told me the most interesting part of all this. What vessel is that on fire? And what has become of the mysterious sailor?"

"I'm coming to that," said Joe.

"I wish you had begun there," laughed Nat,

"considering that the rascal threw me overboard."

"Listen and you will hear his fate," said Joe, with a grandiloquent air. Nat hung on his words as the lad proceeded.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ISLAND.

“Know then,” went on Joe, still keeping up his oratorical pose and gestures, “that yon blazing wreck is none other than the good schooner ‘Island Queen’—or, rather, it *was* the ‘Island Queen.’ On board her are the charred remains of the mysterious sailor who caused us so much trouble and scared me out of seven years’ growth when he grabbed up that potato pan.”

“Good gracious!” exclaimed Nat, in a shocked tone. “You talk about the death of the poor fellow as if it was not a thing to be serious over.”

To his astonishment, the others broke into a laugh at this.

“Well, of all the cold-blooded, unfeeling——” began Nat indignantly.

“Ha! Ha! Ha!” laughed Joe, while Nat

glowered at him wrathfully. "Don't waste any sympathy on the ruffian, Nat."

"Say, this is going too far," burst out Nat. "Do you mean to say that you let the poor fellow perish without making any effort to aid him? No matter what he had done he was a fellow being ——"

"If the Darwinian theory is true, that is," put in Captain Akers quietly, but meaningly.

"Why? What is the ——" began Nat, but Joe saw that the matter had gone far enough and put him out of his suspense.

"Why, that thing wasn't a man at all, Nat," chuckled Joe; "it was a monkey!"

"What!"

"That's right. A big orang-outang from one of the northern islands of the Malay peninsula, probably," put in Captain Akers.

"And he is dead in the flames?"

"Yes, in the flames he kindled himself," put in Joe. "You see, it was shortly before dark when we had all the kerosene transferred, but it was dim enough for us to need a light in the hold to

work by. When all the stuff was out—or, rather, all that we needed of it—we came on deck for a breath of air.

“Hardly had we emerged from the hold before the great ape came leaping and bounding from forward. It clambered over the bow, so we conjectured that it must have hidden itself in the figure-head, or the bow carving, while we were searching for our mysterious annoyer. At any rate, as soon as we got a fair and full view of it, we knew it for what it was.

“It eluded us, when it saw we were in no mood to fly from it, and swung itself down into the hold. In a rage or panic, I don’t know which, it seized up the lamp and smashed it. Instantly the oil-soaked wood blazed up and we lost no time in getting overboard. The last we heard of the orang was a repetition of the terrible cry that had so alarmed us on board the schooner. It evidently perished in the flames.”

“Poor creature,” said Nat. “I suppose it was a ship’s pet and was left on board when the crew deserted their ship.”

"You've no reason to feel so bad about it," put in Joe. "The animal came almost costing you your life."

"But I owed it a good turn for casting loose that boat," said Nat. "If it hadn't been for that, I would not be alive now."

"That's so," agreed Captain Akers soberly. "That fire also was a blessing in disguise, for if it had not occurred you would have had no means of finding us."

The others agreed that it was indeed a fortunate accident that had happened.

Soon after, as there was no occasion to linger about the scene of the destruction of the "Island Queen," the engine was started, on its new fuel, and the "Nomad" sped off.

Her course was south of west. There were light hearts on board as she cut her way along—while far behind her the last of the fire still glowed redly. After almost unparalleled setbacks, they were once more on the sapphire trail.

* * * * *

“Land ho!”

It was two months after the scene depicted above that the look-out—Cal Gifford—uttered the cry that thrilled the company of the gallant little craft.

They all rushed on deck. Nat and Captain Akers from the cabin, in which they had been bending over charts, Sam Hinckley from his engines in company with Captain Nelsen, who had been taking lessons in motor running, and upon the bridge Joe Hartley and Ding-dong, who had been dozing in the tropic noon, stirred into galvanic life.

The land which Cal had spied was plainly visible. A purple mist, like a small cloud, floating on the western horizon.

Nat’s voice thrilled as he turned to Captain Akers and asked:

“Is it the Marquesas?”

“It should be,” was the response. “But I’ll take an observation and make sure.”

The observation confirmed their belief that they were at last in sight of their goal.

"We are now in latitude eight degrees south and longitude one hundred and forty degrees west. Boys, this is a fine land fall," exclaimed the captain enthusiastically. "In all my years at sea I never made a better."

In the midst of the general rejoicing, they none of them noticed that Sam Hinckley alone looked troubled. The sight of the distant land seemed to agitate him strangely. Was it because he had been there before at some period of his life and held no pleasant recollections of it? We shall find out before long.

In the meantime, we must explain the reason for the "Nomad's" slow passage to the vicinity of the islands. In the first place at Honolulu, where they had been compelled to put in for provisions and fresh water, they had been held in quarantine for some time, owing to a plague scare.

The delay was the doubly aggravating because they knew that all the time they were held there the schooner "Nettie Nelsen"—a fast sailer, as we know—was hastening at top speed for the

islands. She, too, they heard, had put in at the Hawaiian port and provisioned and watered, but had gotten away again before the plague scare.

Other delays, caused by the manner in which the kerosene carbonated the motor, had delayed the "Nomad" also. So much so, in fact, that the burning question with those on board her was: Would they be too late for the smart, two-masted craft they were in search of?

There was no reason to suppose that, guessing he would be pursued, Colonel Morello would elect to linger long at the islands. In fact, after disposing of the schooner, the rascally crew would probably split up and by devious routes make for Australia. If this had occurred before they arrived at Ohdahmi, all the Motor Rangers' high hopes were doomed to be blasted.

It was sundown when the "Nomad" at length dropped anchor in a small, glassy bay off the island which they believed to be Ohdahmi. It was a small spot of land, apparently, rising to a high peak in the center. The sides of this mountain, and, in fact, the whole island, so far as they could

see, were clothed in vivid, tropical greenery, forming a sharp contrast to the dull gray of the volcanic rock composing the land.

The bay in which the "Nomad" was anchored was almost landlocked. Opposite to her a great cliff shot up with a perfect cascade of tropical plants falling down its face, at one point, in regular festoons. As their anchor chain rattled out, clouds of birds flew up from the jungle and, after flying about for a time with harsh screams, settled down again for the night.

The boys were crazy to explore the vicinity that night. After their long period of imprisonment in cramped quarters on board the "Nomad," they were naturally desirous of a run on shore. Captain Akers, on being consulted, agreed that there would be no harm in the lads taking the boat and pulling about the bay a bit; but he cautioned them not to land till the morning, as the natives of the Marquesas, while in the main peaceable enough, are sometimes savage and treacherous.

Of course, the boys promised readily enough

and soon after, in the collapsible boat, they were lowered over the side. Nat, Joe Hartley, and Ding-dong Bell, the original Motor Rangers, comprised the party, the rest remaining on board.

With shouts of glee, they pulled for the great, gray cliff-face. The "stay at homes" leaned over the rail and watched their progress through the placid water till the boys neared the strange cascade of greenery hanging down the acclivity like a monstrous beard. At that moment a shout from Sam Hinckley, who had perceived some strange fish overside, distracted their attention for an instant.

When they looked up again, to their amazement the boat had vanished.

They rubbed their eyes and looked and looked again. But of the vanished boat not a sign was to be seen. If the sea had opened and swallowed it, it could not have disappeared more completely from their ken.

"Well, this beats all!" exclaimed Captain Akers. "What can have become of it?"

CHAPTER XX.

THE BOYS ENCOUNTER A BIG SURPRISE.

To the boys in the boat, pulling away from the anchored "Nomad," the island appeared a veritable dreamland of beauty and fertility. The gray cliff-face, sheer and rugged, was topped by a fairy-like growth of lofty palms and intertwining creepers. They could see fruits and flowers of strange shapes and gorgeous hues shining among the foliage.

"Well, this must be Utopia, all right," breathed Joe.

"Wh-w-w-w-w-whenever that mar-mar-may be," stuttered Ding-dong, with a grin.

"It's where folks talk straight," parried Joe, which brought a laugh both from the good-natured Ding-dong and from Nat, who was at the oars.

"Say, let's take a look at that great mass of

creepers and stuff that hangs over the cliff-face," said Joe suddenly.

The others were nothing loathe.

"But we promised Captain Akers that we would not land," reminded the dutiful Joe.

"Well, this won't be landing," temporized Nat, who was fairly carried away with a desire to examine this South Sea fairyland.

"That's so," agreed Joe; "well, row ahead and put us alongside yon waterfall of fruits and flowers."

"My, but you are per-per-poetical," snorted Ding-dong.

"This place would make a goat poetical," retorted the other, as Nat, with some powerful strokes, sent them flying over the still, lake-like surface of the water, which reflected the cliff in every detail, and into whose depths they could see quite clearly. Below them myriads of bright colored fish sported and swam amid seaweed of fantastic form and hue.

All this could be seen as if they were gazing into a cool, green mirror.

But in a few minutes they were alongside the tumbling mass of creepers. Such was the impetus of the boat, in fact, that Nat, who had not been on the lookout, could not stop it.

"What ho, she bumps!" shouted Joe, steadying himself in preparation for the coming shock. But, to his astonishment, the boat, instead of bumping into the creepers with a hard shock, passed clean through them.

In an instant they found themselves shut out from the open lagoon or bay behind them, and were floating in a deep sort of lake, hemmed in by high cliffs. This was screened from the sea by what may well be termed a natural drop curtain—to wit, the hanging mass of creepers through which the boat had passed.

"Well, did you ever?" exclaimed Joe, as he gazed about him.

"N-n-n-n-n-o, I ner-ner-ner-never," responded Ding-dong, with deep conviction. His tones echoed back solemnly from the amphitheater of cliffs that towered on every side of them, their

rough faces being reflected as in a looking-glass by the still water.

It was at this moment that consternation over their disappearance was at its height on board the "Nomad." But, boy-like, the lads did not consider this.

"Let's explore this place a bit before we go back," suggested Nat, who had noted that the lake narrowed at its farther end to a river, which flowed at the bottom of a narrow and deep gorge.

He fell to on his oars once more and the boat was soon traversing the depths of the gloomy abyss. All at once the cleft in the rocks widened and they emerged upon another lake.

And right here the biggest surprise any of them had ever encountered awaited them.

Anchored in the middle of the landlocked body of water was a schooner.

On her stern the boys had hardly finished reading the name "Nettie Nelsen," before a fresh surprise almost overwhelmed them.

From behind them there suddenly sounded a

harsh voice, which Nat, at least, knew only too well:

“Well! Well! Some really welcome visitors!”

They turned to face the hawk-like features of Colonel Morello, who stood on the banks of the lake.

By his side was Dayton, while behind them several other ill-favored members of the band hung about. The first thing that Nat noticed was that Colonel Morello held a leveled rifle pointed straight at him. The next was that Dayton held the same position and that the trigger fingers of both were in a position instantly to discharge their weapons.

“I rather think you had better come ashore, boys,” cooed the half-Mexican rascal in his silkiest tones. “To descend to slang, it looks to me rather as if we had the drop on you.”

Nat could not but admit it. He cast one despairing glance about him and saw that escape was impossible. With a face that was rather paler than was its wont, he took up the oars, and a few minutes later Morello's band had laid hold

of the prow of the boat and were dragging it up on the beach. Some of them laid rough hands on the boys as they stepped out, but Morello's voice checked them.

"Steady, boys, steady," he ordered; "plenty of time to even up our scores with the young ne'er-do-wells. Ha! Ha! It was really amusing the way you boys just walked into our trap," he went on. "We sighted your craft approaching the island some time ago, but we had hardly prepared to receive you before to-morrow, and now," he went on in the same taunting tone, "as it is getting dark let us make our way to my humble residence, where to-night you will be accommodated with lodgings. After to-morrow you will not need them," he added, with savage emphasis.

"Colonel Morello," said Nat, in a steady voice, "I think you are the biggest scoundrel I ever saw."

"Really you compliment me," rejoined the ruffian, with a hideous leer. "Now, boys," he went on, addressing his followers, "just march these young cubs up to the camp. To-morrow we'll get

the rest of the precious party and then we'll take a trip to Australia in their gasolene cruiser—eh, Dayton?"

"I guess that's the program, colonel," smiled the rascal addressed. "Oh, there's no question about it but that Master Trevor here has proven a very accommodating youth."

The others chuckled loudly at this sally. Nat's blood boiled within him. Joe's cheeks flamed angrily, while Ding-dong looked daggers at the scoundrel. But so far as making reprisals went, the Motor Rangers were as powerless as kittens.

This time Morello undoubtedly would not give them even the shadow of a chance to escape. Their situation appeared well-nigh hopeless to all but Nat.

With every reason to feel despondent—nay, hopeless—the lad determined to keep his eyes open in the rather vain hope that something might turn up which they could seize upon to advantage.

But when they reached the camp, after some half hour of traversing a rough, stony section of

the island, thickly strewn with boulders and intergrown with coarse grass and brush, he had to own that the prospects of escape were, to say the least, not at all numerous.

The camp was located in the bottom of a sort of deep dell, leading up from the lake, and was evidently on the edge of a plantation, at least, so the boys judged from the orderly way in which the trees were planted out. As for the camp itself, it consisted of a collection of tents and huts, roughly made from limbs of trees and roofed with branches. But in that mild climate such protection was ample.

To Nat's surprise, as they approached this camp, from among the tents and rough shacks, a strange figure to be met with under the circumstances advanced to meet them. It was the figure of a tall American, in white duck and wearing a broad-brimmed Jippa Jappa hat. His feet were encased in sandals, and about his waist was a red sash. An inky black beard grew about the lower part of his face. Perhaps it was there to hide the cruel and sinister mouth. For the

rest he was tall, had a commanding carriage and seemed to be considerably above the social station of the ruffians he was consorting with.

As he came forward, Morello addressed him.

"Ah, Mr. Gooddale, well met. We have brought some visitors with us, as you will see. They are young rascals who are in the pay of the United States government to spy on honest traders in the South Seas."

The amazing affrontery of such a misstatement, for whatever purpose it was uttered, fairly took Nat's breath away. He could say nothing, but stood looking at the newcomer, who, in turn, stared at the boys.

Then he spoke in a rasping, unpleasant voice.

"Well, Morello, you must do as you wish with them. It is not my affair at all, but from what you have told me of them I think that such lads are better out of harm's way."

"Exactly," rejoined Morello, "and now, if you please, I will have them placed somewhere where they will be safe for the night. One of them

particularly is a very slippery youth," casting a lowering glance at Nat.

"Just as you please, Morello," responded the other listlessly. "You must have your way, I suppose. At any rate, Elias Gooddale will not oppose you."

"Elias Gooddale!" exclaimed Nat, startled out of his resolve to keep silent whatever might happen.

The black-bearded man bent a piercing gaze upon him.

"Yes, young man, that is my name," was his response.

"That is queer," rejoined Nat, who scented some mystery; "the last time I encountered any one of your name was in a hut in the Sierras."

The other started and turned pale.

"In the Sierra Nevadas, you mean?"

"That's it—yes. He was a miner there. We visited his hut."

With still more agitation, the other went on:

"This is a most extraordinary thing. A man of the same name as myself. Strange—very."

But Nat shrewdly saw that the other's agitation proceeded from some deeper-seated cause than his surprise at a similarity in names.

"What did he say to you?" asked this new Elias Gooddale eagerly.

"Nothing," responded Nat.

"Nothing," echoed the other. "Don't trifle with me, boy. Did he not say something about righting a wrong? Did he not say anything?"

Nat shook his head.

"The Elias Gooddale we knew had been dead some time when we discovered his body," he rejoined.

The black-bearded man gave an exclamation of amazement and consternation. He regarded Nat more closely than ever.

"Clearly," thought the boy, "I have stumbled on some tangle that may be of use to us."

As the other plied him with more questions, he resolved to be as secretive as possible.

CHAPTER XXI.

ATTACKED BY MARQUESANS.

But for some purposes of his own, Morello, on a whispered word from Dayton, brought the examination to an abrupt conclusion. The boys were then, on Morello's orders, bound closely with fiber ropes, and after being hustled into a thick grove of dark-leaved bread-fruit trees in the back of the camp, were thrown into a hut made of pliant strands of some sort of bark, interwoven with bamboo uprights.

The appearance of the hut apprised Nat at once that it was of native manufacture. Evidently, then, this island either at the present time or at some remote period, had provided a living place for native tribesmen. The lad wondered if any of them were on it now, or if they had either fled or been wiped out before the white man.

Even in the dangerous predicament in which

he and his companions were now placed, Nat could not help speculating as to the connection between this Elias Gooddale of the South Seas and the dead miner of the same name, whose hoard of sapphires had brought them into this strange maze of adventures.

The other Motor Rangers, too, were puzzled by the strange phase the case had assumed. But they could hit on no explanation.

"I wish I had that tin box with the papers we found in the hut," thought Nat. "I never read them all through. I wish I had now, for perhaps among them might be some document that would throw light on the matter."

But the consideration of their grave danger soon drove all thoughts but those of the immediate present out of the lad's head. At about eight-thirty, as well as he could judge, the two men who had been placed to guard them were relieved by two others, who brought with them the lads' suppers. These consisted of dried fish and rice, with water as a beverage. Their hands were released while they ate, but before long their guardians re-

tied them, strapping them close to their sides in a manner that made all hope of working them loose seem futile.

The two men who had "relieved guard" were both stout, stockily built men, roughly dressed. Owing to the heat, they had discarded the garments they had worn when in the Sierras, and now were attired only in light canvas trousers, seemingly made from sail cloth, and sleeveless undershirts. After the boys had been fed and re-manacled, the two sentries, with their rifles between their knees, took up their positions at the door of the hut. They conversed in low tones and much of their conversation was audible to the boys.

"I, for one, say to blazes with this way of living," said one of them, in a grumbling tone. "When are we going to clear out for Australia, as Morello promised?"

"That depends on him," rejoined the other. "He ain't the one to give his plans away. Looks as if he and this Gooddale had something between them."

"It does that for a fact," was the reply, "and by the same token this Gooddale is a puzzle to me. Who is he, anyhow?"

"Well, beyond the fact that he owns a plantation down here, and seems to be an old pal of Morello's, it's hard to figger out. I reckon he's a mystery. One thing I know, he wasn't sorry when we arrived. These natives at the other end of the island had been invading his plantations pretty regular. From what I've heard, they threatened to attack him in war canoes if something—money, I guess—wasn't forthcoming before long."

"Phew!" whistled the other. "I hopes them natives don't take it into their fuzzy heads to attack the ranch while we are here. I've heard they are savage fighters and give no quarter."

"That's right, I guess. However, from all that I can hear, they ain't likely to get ugly so long as we are about. Figger out we're too strong a party for them, I guess. Don't know as I blame them for being sore on this Gooddale, either. From all I can hear, he treated them badly when

first he settled on the island, and now they are just bent on making him pay for it."

"And if he won't give up?"

"In that case I guess they'll take it out of his hide. In other words, raid the place and do all the damage they can."

"But don't the French gunboats patrol around here pretty regular?"

"I guess so. But they couldn't spare the men or the time to send expeditions inter the interior of the islands. The natives know every path and trail. It might take months to punish them, so they have things pretty much their own way."

"It sure looks like that," agreed his companion. "But how about having a pull at that Pisco bottle?"

"Here it is," rejoined the other, apparently producing some sort of bottle and passing it to his companion.

"Ah-h-h-h-h-h, that was good," breathed one of the voices, after an interval.

"Well, you want to be careful how much you drink of it," was the answer. "It's fiery stuff, all

right. They say that it has been the ruin of the natives down here."

"Comes from Peru, don't it?"

"That's right. But hark!—what in the name of the Old Harry is that?"

The boys, who had listened to this conversation with interest, wondered, too, what a sudden commotion in the direction of the camp might betoken.

Shouts, cries, and imprecations arose on the night air. Presently a fusillade of shots rang out.

"We're attacked!" shouted one of the men outside the hut. "Come on! Let's get over there!"

The next instant their retreating footsteps could be heard. In the meantime, the clamor and shooting had redoubled. Evidently whatever was occurring was marked by severe casualties, for the boys could hear groans and cries of pain mingling with the shouts of the fighters.

"Whatever can be happening?" gasped Joe.

"It sounds as if our friends, Colonel Morello's

men, were getting the worst of it, anyway," declared Nat. "Hark!"

Savage cries with a triumphant ring to them could be heard, accompanied by a sort of war-like dirge.

"It's the natives!" cried Nat, his doubts cleared away by this last.

"They've attacked the camp!" cried Joe.

"Wer-wer-will they get after us?" gasped Ding-dong through the darkness.

"Impossible to say," was Nat's rejoinder. "All we can do is to hope not. I don't know, though, that we should be worse off in their hands than in the clutches of Colonel Morello."

"If only we could get free of these ropes, we could escape in the excitement," exclaimed Joe. "Oh, what wouldn't I give for a knife!"

"Mer-mer-uch good it would do you wer-wer-when you can't use your hands," scoffed Ding-dong Bell scornfully.

"That's so," agreed Joe, somewhat crestfallen. "There's nothing we can do, is there?"

"Nothing except to wait," declared Nat, "and that's the hardest thing in the world."

Suddenly the door of the hut flew open and a figure dashed in. It was pitch dark or Nat would have recognized it as one of their guards of a few minutes before. The fellow was wounded, seemingly, for he gave a groan and pitched forward as he entered the hut, which, as it was some distance from the main camp, he had evidently hit upon as a good hiding place.

"Oh," he moaned, in the darkness, "I'm wounded. Oh, somebody please tie up my shoulder."

A sudden idea struck Nat.

"I'd bandage it for you if I was free," he said.

"That's so," groaned the man; "you are bound, ain't you? But say, I kin use my left hand a bit and maybe I can cut you free. But will you promise to bandage my shoulder to prevent more blood flowing, if I do so?"

This was what Nat hoped for, and he readily agreed to do as the injured man requested. In a few seconds he felt the fellow's left hand fum-

bling about for the ropes. Presently, after hacking a bit, he severed one. It was one of the wrist thongs. With his hands free, the rest was easy for Nat. Taking the knife from the man, he cut the rest of his bonds and then liberated his companions. In the meantime, the man, in broken, disjointed sentences, had told them what had happened. Colonel Morello's band and Gooddale had been taken totally by surprise by the natives and had been utterly routed. Many of them had escaped to the schooner, but several were wounded in the fight.

After he was free Nat did not forget his promise, but tearing some strips from his shirt formed a rough bandage, with which he managed to assuage the flow of blood from the wounded man's shoulder.

"Thank you," breathed the fellow, as Nat finished his ministrations, "I might have bled to death if it hadn't a bin for you kids. I'm glad you are free and I hope you don't get caught by them natives. They are the worst looking bunch I ever saw. Most of 'em naked and painted, and

with big china door knobs and such stuff slung about 'em, and great big spears."

Nat moved the water jar, which they had drunk from at supper—if such the meal may be called—closer to the wounded man and dragged him to a corner of the hut. There was a pile of leaves there—the big, broad foliage of the banana.

"Cover me with them," asked the man. "They'll hide me if any of them natives comes ter look in here."

Nat did this, and then, expressing a hope that the injured man, who, after all, had done them a good turn, would be all right, he and his companions set out.

Freed from their captivity by what seemed almost a miracle, they hesitated as they passed the portal of the hut.

Which way should they go?

As they lingered a fresh chorus of savage howls broke out on the air from the direction of the camp. At the same instant a faint illumination glowed upon the night. It spread and glared

up fiercely, tinting the skies as it flamed higher.

To complete their work of devastation, the savages had fired the camp. From their howls and cries, they were dancing about it.

"Which way shall we go?" asked Joe, voicing the question in the hearts of all.

"I vote for the lake," said Nat. "Maybe we can find a boat there and make our way through the ravine and back to the 'Nomad.' "

Accordingly, skirting cautiously through the tropical growth, they made for the direction in which they judged the lake lay. The glare of the burning camp lit their path with a weird radiance, as they pushed onward.

CHAPTER XXII.

A STRANGE MEETING.

They gained the shores of the "lake" at a point a good distance removed from the vicinity of Colonel Morello's camp. But they no sooner reached the shore than by the light of the flames they perceived that, as the wounded man had said, some indeed of the band must have eluded capture or injury by the savages.

The two-masted schooner which had been the theater of Nat's former thrilling adventures was already in motion. With canvas up, she was heading for the mouth of the gorge.

Seemingly, the savages who had attacked the camp must have been a land force, for, although the boys could see several of them on the bank of the lake in the neighborhood of the burning camp, they made no effort to pursue the schooner. But

as they watched her glide off they could be heard to utter angry cries and shouts.

"Well, so far, it looks as if the schooner will get off scot free," remarked Nat; "but what are they going to do when they come to the gorge? They can't sail her through that."

"Hardly," agreed Joe. "I guess when they reach it they will either tow her by boats or else warp her through by casting out the anchor and then pull in up on the cable."

The latter was, in fact, the means used by the fugitives to get through the narrow gorge. On board her were Colonel Morello, Ed. Dayton, and a dozen others, including Larsen, the giant Swede who acted as the vessel's navigator. They had escaped from the village when it was attacked by the natives and made straight for the banks of the lake where they had embarked in the collapsible boat brought by the boys and another small craft which they had there.

When they reached the open sea, after pushing through the curtain of greenery, the collapsible boat was cast adrift.

In the meantime, the boys had circled a great part of the lake in search of some sort of a boat which they thought might have been left there by either Gooddale or some of Morello's men.

All this took a long time, and it was close to midnight when Nat, who was in advance of the party, stopped and gave a cry of delight. Ahead of them on the white beach lay a canoe, turned bottom upward.

"Hooray!" shouted Nat. "With some branches for paddles we can make good our escape in this, all right. Boys, suppose you go and cut some limbs from those trees while I turn the canoe over and get her in the water, and then hooray! for the dear old 'Nomad.' "

Joe and Ding-dong, in a hurry to complete their errand, plunged into the dense jungle in search of suitable limbs, while Nat hastened to the side of the canoe and turned it over. As he did so he got one of the most thrilling shocks of his life.

From under the craft there leaped three hideous, painted savages. Their noses were trans-



They poised their spears threateningly at Nat who stood transfixed with alarm and astonishment.

fixed with wooden pegs, brass rings hung from their ears, extending the lobes to an unnatural size. Round their necks hung strings of door-knobs, old cartridges, and various other bits of hardware.

They poised their spears threateningly at Nat who stood transfixed with alarm and astonishment.

The men formed part of an outlying system of sentries, posted by the wily old chief of the tribe.

One of them clapped his hand to his lips as a signal for silence, emphasizing his order by a flourish of his spear.

But he need not have done so. Nat knew that to make an outcry would mean that Ding-dong and Joe Hartley would come bounding to his assistance. In that case, they would be in as grave a fix as he was. So he remained silent while his captors signaled to him to follow them.

With one at his side and two spearsmen behind him, Nat had no recourse but to obey. As he stumbled along, for the savages were stepping

out briskly, Nat found himself wondering what Ding-dong and Joe would think when they returned to the beach and found the canoe deserted. He hoped they would have presence of mind enough to waste no time in looking for him, but make all haste to the "Nomad" and summon aid.

If they did this he might be able to stave off harm till aid arrived. But in case it did not, Nat, foolishly perhaps, did not feel any immediate apprehension. His captors, while savage looking and menacing, did not appear willing to offer him any actual harm.

"I wonder where we are heading for?" thought Nat, as they hastened along, skirting the shores of the lake at the same brisk pace.

"I guess we are going back to the camp where the chief must be. In that case, it won't be long before I know what is to be done with me. If I can only convince the savages that I am as much an enemy of Gooddale and Morello as they are, I may get off without any trouble."

Buoying up his spirits by such thoughts, Nat

stepped out as boldly as his captors, who from time to time conversed with each other in guttural monotones.

As Nat had surmised, their course was laid for the still blazing camp. At the pace they were going they reached it far quicker than it had taken the boys to traverse the distance to the canoe, for the savages had no need to dodge in and out of trees and shrubbery to avoid being seen.

It was a wild and strange scene that met Nat's eyes as he and his escort entered the burned camp. Savages, all attired—or, rather, unattired—like his captors were swarming everywhere.

They capered and danced about the ruins with shrill cries. Evidently they thought they had accomplished an excellent night's work. Here and there Nat noted, with a shudder, some still forms lying huddled and motionless. He knew that these must be the bodies of the victims of the fight which followed when the camp was surprised.

Were Morello and Dayton among them, he

wondered, or had they escaped on the schooner the lads had seen standing off down the lake?

In front of one of the burned huts a tall savage stood, leaning on his spear. The fire-light played on his features and it struck Nat that the man had a far more intelligent look than his followers, at any rate those whom he had seen of them.

It soon transpired that this savage was none other than the chief of the tribe, or, at least, a person of authority. Nat was marched straight up to him and an excited colloquy between the chief and the men who had been lying under the canoe at once began. Other tribesmen came up while it was in progress. They gazed curiously at Nat, but offered him no violence. He wondered what would come next. He was not left long in doubt.

The chief gave a wave of his hand and presently Nat was led off once more. This time he was escorted to a grove of bread-fruit trees and then his hands were strapped behind him around one of the trunks. He was a prisoner for the sec-

ond time that day, and, by a strange fatality, in almost the same place as had been the scene of his first captivity.

"This looks bad," muttered Nat, half aloud, as the savages, having tied him, walked off again, retracing their steps to the looted camp. "Nat Trevor, you'll need all your courage."

To his amazement, the next instant a voice came out of the darkness, evidently not far from him.

"Who is that who speaks of Nat Trevor?"

"Captain Akers!" exclaimed Nat. "How in the world did you get here?"

"Then it is you!" exclaimed the captain. "This is a most extraordinary meeting, Nat. I fear that we have about reached the end of our tether."

"Not by a long shot," chimed in another familiar voice, which Nat recognized with delight as being that of Cal Gifford. "Nat and me has been in as tough places and gotten out—ain't we, Nat?"

"That's right, Cal," was the rejoinder. "But

that isn't answering my question. How did you come to be here?"

"Well, you see," said Captain Akers, "when you didn't come back we decided that something serious must be wrong, and me and Cal set out in the other boat to look for you. It didn't take us long to reach the spot where we had last seen you and to discover that all that green stuff on the cliff-face hid an opening.

"We guessed you must have entered it with the boat and pulled through it. Then we headed up the gorge. We soon emerged into that lake yonder, and saw lights in the camp—or what we later discovered was the camp. Drawing the boat up on shore, so as to half conceal her near the bushes, we set out to reconnoiter. We crept through the jungle till we had gotten quite close to the camp, and the first thing we heard was the voice of that rascal Morello talking about how neatly he had trapped you.

"You kin bet we was mad," put in Cal, "but what could we do? While we was figgering out some way to find your place of imprisonment and

aid you, the attack on the camp came. We tried to get away, but a party of them niggers came right up on us. I guess that's about all, except that here we are. And now tell us your story."

Nat briefly related what had occurred to them since they left the "Nomad." His recital was received with exclamations of astonishment by both Cal and Captain Akers. Both were likewise much concerned over the predicament that both Ding-dong and Joe must by that time be in. They had no doubt returned to the boat soon after Nat and his captors had left it. The question was, would they paddle off for the "Nomad" or remain where they were in the hope that Nat would return?

Suddenly Cal scattered all meditations on this subject by a sharp exclamation.

"What's the matter?" asked Captain Akers curiously.

"Nuthin' much, only I got my hands free," drawled Cal, in the most unconcerned manner.

CHAPTER XXIII.

NAT'S SKYROCKET ARTILLERY.

"The boat lies off in that direction. We had better make our way to her at top speed."

It was Captain Akers who spoke, fifteen minutes later. In that time Cal had wriggled out of his own bonds and freed the others. Our party now stood in the shadows of the grove, while clearly borne to them came the shouts and yells of the still excited tribesmen.

"Once on board her we can institute a search for Ding-dong and Joe," whispered Nat. "They cannot be so very far off, unless they pulled direct for the gorge."

"Well, let's vamoose then, at once," struck in Cal. "No sense in lingering. Those Kanakas think we are tied too securely to bother with us, but who knows that one of them might take a

notion into his ugly head at any minute to come and look at us to make sure."

"That's right," agreed Nat. "Lead the way then, Captain, we will follow."

Without more ado the captain struck off into the undergrowth, his two companions pushing along behind him. But as they plunged from the clearing into the brush, as ill luck would have it, Captain Akers' foot struck one of the savages who had chosen that spot to take a quiet nap.

The fellow leaped to his feet with a yell that rang echoing all about. The next instant Captain Akers' fist crashed into the man's face and he measured his length. But the mischief had been done. Like a pack of hounds in full cry, most of the tribe came rushing toward the spot to ascertain the cause of the outcry.

"Come on. It's a run for life now!" panted the skipper, dashing off.

The others followed as quietly as possible, but still they could not avoid making some noise as they traversed the tangle.

To men as keenly trained in the primitive

senses as the savages, it was thus an easy matter to follow them.

"Heaven grant the boat is there or we are lost men," breathed the captain, as they sped along with the savage yells ringing out menacingly behind them. It was indeed, as the captain had said, a run for life.

Before long they emerged from the vegetation and found themselves once more on the lake shore.

Captain Akers gave a groan as he looked about him.

No boat was to be seen.

"We're done for," he gasped desperately.

"Look, what is that dark object up the beach there!" exclaimed Nat.

"Good for you, lad, I believe that is the boat!" exclaimed the captain. "I miscalculated our whereabouts and gave her up for lost. Come on! Sharp's the word."

At top speed they fled along the sandy shore.

But an appalling din behind them told them better than words that they had been seen.

A few minutes now would decide all.

Wh-i-z-z-z-z-z-z!

Something whistled by Nat's ear and sank quivering in the ground just ahead of him.

It was a spear. The boy shuddered as he thought how narrowly the cruel weapon had missed sinking between his shoulder blades.

The next instant they were at the boat's side. But the tide had fallen since she was beached, and to their consternation there was quite a distance to push her before she would be afloat.

But they gritted their teeth and caught hold. As they did so, Nat's hand encountered a box lying by the gunwale of the craft.

"What in the world is that?" he asked.

"Oh," panted Cal, "that's the skyrockets. I brought them with the idea of signaling the others if I found you."

"Hooray!" shouted Nat.

The others gazed at him in astonishment. For an instant they thought his mind had given way under the strain of the past twelve hours.

"What's the matter?" asked Captain Akers.

“The rockets—hooray! We’ll use them as weapons against the natives!”

“By hookey, the boy is right!” exclaimed Captain Akers. “I once scared off a band of Patagonians in that way when a ship I commanded ran ashore.”

“We’ll have to look sharp,” said Nat, taking one of the rockets. They were big ones, intended for signaling at sea. The sticks were already fitted.

“Lucky that they will be just as effective skimming over the ground as if they went straight up in the air,” exclaimed Nat.

He laid one in the bow of the boat, where it came to a point, and lost no time in applying a match to it.

As the flame blazed up a yell apprised him that the savages, who had been baffled for an instant, had sighted them.

With ferocious, blood-curdling cries, the Polynesians charged on the boat, waving their weapons in hideous significance.

"Yell away," gritted out Cal. "You'll squall louder yet in a minute, my pesky, yaller coyotes."

The first of the savages, a huge, gaunt fellow, was within fifty feet of the boat when the rocket, with a loud "fi-z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z!" tore loose. Straight as an arrow it sped, driven by its tail of fire.

The next instant it struck the advancing savage in the breast. With a howl of terror, he fell flat, and the rocket, deflected from its course, went hissing and roaring like a devouring serpent among his followers.

Before they could make a move, to avoid the mysterious fiery peril, it exploded with a terrific "bang!"

Brilliantly colored globes of fire spattered from it in all directions. Red, green, and blue. The savages howled with terror and rage and mystification. This was a new method of warfare to them.

"Hooray! we've got 'em going!" shouted Cal, as the savage, whom the rocket had knocked over,

scrambled to his feet with surprising agility and sprinted back among his brethren.

"That was shot Number One!" cried Nat, putting another rocket in place and lighting the fuse.

Like the other, the second rocket sped straight and true for the massed bodies of the aborigines. Before they could recover from their surprise, it was upon them. Roaring and sputtering like a fiery comet, it sped among their legs, sending sparks and fire all over them. As the brands fell on their naked skins the savages broke into wild yells and cries. Panic reigned in their ranks.

In the light of the bursting star-case of the rocket our party could see black forms darting off into the bush in all directions. The ordeal of fire had proven too much for them. They shouted with fear as they ran helter-skelter in every direction.

Our friends shouted, too, but with far different emotions, as they shoved the boat over the strip of sand between her and the water's edge.

In another minute they had her launched and were off. Cal took the oar and sent the light

craft flying across the smooth surface of the lake.

Suddenly Nat gave a cry.

"There's a canoe ahead there coming toward us!"

"By George, so there is!" cried Captain Akers. "What if it is the forerunner of a fleet of them?"

But there was no cause for such apprehension, for the craft, in a few seconds more, proved to be none other than the canoe beneath which Nat had surprised the sleeping savages. In it were Joe and Ding-dong. They had been profoundly distressed at Nat's vanishment and their relief when they heard his voice may be imagined.

They had seen the rockets while they were disconsolately paddling about, waiting for daylight to prosecute a search for their companions. Rightly surmising that they were fired by members of the Motor Ranger party, they at once made for that direction. They were little prepared, however for the surprise that awaited them.

The reunited party then all took places in the "Nomad's" boat, towing the canoe astern.

A dull, gray dawn was just breaking as they set out once more for the mouth of the gorge that led to the sea. Rapidly they neared it. But as they did so Nat, who was gazing toward the shore, uttered a sudden cry of consternation. The others, following the direction of his gaze, could see crowds of savages running along the beach.

"What can they be after?" shouted Joe. "They seem to have some object in mind."

"A terrible one, I am afraid," said Nat gravely. He had guessed the meaning of the natives' haste.

"If I'm not mistaken—and I hope I am—they are headed for the gorge. They know we shall have to pass through it to escape."

"Well, what then?"

The question came from Cal, who was not particularly quick-witted, despite all his other good qualities.

"What then?" echoed Nat. "Why, if they get there first, they can hurl rocks or spears down on us and soon put us out of commission."

"What is to be done?" asked Joe, in a dismayed voice.

"We must get to the gorge first."

"It will be a desperate race," put in Captain Akers.

"And one in which the stakes are life or death," was Nat's comment.

The canoe was cut loose so that they could make better progress, and the boat fairly hissed over the water. But the natives of these islands where there are no horses are prodigiously swift runners. They saw, to their dismay, that fast as they rowed the natives ashore were as swift, or perhaps a shade faster.

At last the entrance of the gloomy gorge loomed in front of them. Its sides towered steeply, showing a thin strip of sky at the summit. Through this narrow passage they must pass to win freedom.

The hearts of all beat faster as the boat entered the shadows of the defile. Nat's breath came thickly and his heart beat fast. Joe and Ding-dong showed, too, by their white, set faces,

that they felt the strain painfully. Captain Akers sat in the stern with a composed face. He had looked on danger too often to tremble now. Cal was as unconcerned as ever, outwardly, but a certain nervous twitching of his facial muscles showed that even his iron nerve was shaken.

And small wonder. A stone—not a very large one, either—pitched from the top of the defile would inevitably have sunk the boat. The impetus gained in its three-hundred-foot fall would have given it a crushing force twenty times superior to its own weight.

They had rowed perhaps a hundred feet into the defile when Joe, who was gazing up at the sharply defined edges, gave a cry and pointed.

Outlined against the sky far above them was a brown-skinned figure. It was joined by another and another. They gazed down at the boat, gesticulating furiously.

"It's all off," groaned Cal tragically.

"We must keep on going and trust to Providence," decided Captain Akers. "It would mean death anyway if we turned back now."

The boat sped on and presently the figures disappeared. Had they gone to get rocks with which to pelt the boat? This was soon answered. Before ten seconds had passed they were back again. But this time, to the boys' horror, they saw that the natives had a large stone which they were rolling to the edge of the defile. Their evident intention was to drop it on the boat as it passed beneath.

"Pull for your lives!" yelled Captain Akers. "There's one chance in a hundred we may beat them."

The boat shot forward in a desperate spurt.

At the same moment the natives trundled the stone to the edge of the ravine. For one instant it trembled on the lip of the abyss, and then—it fell!

Involuntarily those in the boat crouched as they saw what was coming. But this time, at least, fortune favored our friends, for the big stone missed the boat by a fraction of an inch, the force of its impact with the water sending up great waves from the stern.

Before the savages, who had launched the stone just one fraction of a second too late to annihilate the boat, could recover their wits, the lads were out of harm's way. For the surface at the summit of the cliff was covered with underbrush and the savages, who were the advance guard of the rest, could not hope to keep pace with the boat through it. A shower of spears came after them, striking the water like hail. But not one struck the boat.

Half an hour later the boat traversed the curtain of creepers and emerged upon the surface of the open sea.

"Now for the 'Nomad'!" shouted Joe, as they shoved through the suspended panoply. But his rejoicing was rather premature.

To their dismay, and no less astonishment, no sign of the "Nomad" was to be seen. As far as the eye could reach the sea was empty of life as the desert at noonday.

It was a bitter disappointment and for some time not one of the party could find words to convey the bitterness of his spirits.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE LAST OF THE "NETTIE NELSEN."—CON- CLUSION.

But they had little time to brood over their misfortune. Hardly had they made the discovery, in fact, before Captain Akers gave a low exclamation and pointed seaward. At first the boys could see nothing but peculiar, wispy-looking clouds floating near the horizon.

But even in the short time they gazed the clouds became larger.

"Is bad weather coming?" asked Nat uneasily.

"Yes, my lad, it is," was the grave reply. "Those clouds yonder look to me like the fore-runners of a typhoon."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Nat, "and this boat is overloaded as it is. What are we to do?"

"My advice is to skirt along the coast till we find a place to land and then run the boat ashore."

"But the shore may be swarming with savages," objected Nat.

The captain shrugged his shoulders.

"Can't be helped, my lad," he said, "and, after all, we stand a better chance with the savages than we do in this boat in a typhoon."

They could not help admitting that this seemed true. In even a moderate gale the lightly built collapsible craft would not last long. In one of the savage typhoons of Polynesia she would be sunk like a stone.

No time was lost therefore in getting out the oars and starting to pull along the coast. Acting on Captain Akers' recommendation, they kept close in to the shore. But they were not rewarded by the sight of any good landing place. On the contrary, Odahmi—like the other islands of the Marquesas Group—rose precipitately from the water, the cliffs towering steeply up from the surface of the sea.

"What is that peculiar looking object over there?" asked Nat suddenly.

He indicated a black thing bobbing about on

the water. It was not so very far distant from the boat and they all gazed at it with interest.

"It's a barrel!" exclaimed Captain Akers presently, "and—really this is very curious—it has two smaller barrels attached to each side so as to keep it upright. If it wasn't that bad weather may be on us at any moment, I'd like to look into this thing."

"It certainly looks peculiar," admitted Nat. "Hark!" he broke off suddenly. "I can hear somebody singing!"

Sure enough, there came borne to their ears the sound of a song, intoned in a not over musical voice:

"My bonnie lies over the oc-e-a-n!

My bonnie lies ov-er the sea!

My bonnie lies ov-er the ocean!

O-ho-o, bring back my bonnie to me!"

"Where on earth is it coming from?" gasped Nat, glancing about. He half suspected that Ding-dong might be playing a trick. But no, the

stuttering lad's face was puzzled as the countenances of the others.

"It's coming from that barrel!"

The words came from Captain Akers.

"Impossible!" cried Nat.

"I'm not so sure about that," struck in Cal. "I've got purty good ears, an' it certainly seems to me that the singing is coming frum that keg."

"Ahoy there!" shouted the captain, determined to put an end to the mystery once and for all. "Who are you in that keg?"

"Ahoy!" came back the answer in ringing tone, though somewhat muffled. "I'm Sam Hinckley, a marooned sailor. Who——"

But Sam got no further. With vigorous strokes the boat was pulled alongside, while the Motor Rangers and their chums shot out volleys of questions. The barrel was quickly secured alongside and the top, after some difficulty, broken in with an oar butt.

The next instant Sam, rather pale and wan looking, but otherwise seemingly not much the worse for his ordeal, emerged from it. As soon

as he was somewhat recovered, and the boat once more under way, he related his story. As they had suspected, the placing of Sam in the barrel had been one of Morello's devices and came about in this way.

After Captain Akers and Cal had left the "Nomad" in search of the lads, Sam and Captain Nelsen took watch and watch about, waiting for something to transpire.

Sam was on watch in the early morning when, through the darkness, he saw the dark outline of the schooner—which, it will be recalled, had slipped out of the landlocked lake—heading toward them. Presently she came to anchor and stopped. A boat was lowered and several men, all armed fully, clambered into it.

In the meantime, Sam had summoned Captain Nelsen from his berth. But the veteran mariner was as unable as Sam to devise a means of coping with the situation. His advice was not to resist, which, in the long run, would have been useless, but to cut and run for it. In accordance with this

resolve, Sam went below, while Captain Nelsen got up anchor.

The next instant the "Nomad" was moving swiftly through the water, while a howl of rage went up from the baffled occupants of Morello's boat. But, having started his engines, Sam could not resist the temptation to run astern and shake a fist at the rascals. In doing this he had lost his balance, and before he could utter a cry, or even make a sound, he was overboard.

In the meantime, Captain Nelsen, who was at the wheel of the "Nomad," and supposed Sam was still below at his engines, kept right on. When he came to the surface Sam found that the "Nomad" was some distance off and Morello's boat close upon him. The next instant hands reached out for him from the craft and he was dragged on board, and, on his shouting to attract Nelsen's attention, was promptly knocked on the head.

He came to in the cabin of the schooner and here, as Sam said, he got a shock. Bending over

him was the form of a man he knew only too well. That of Elias Gooddale.

"But Elias Gooddale is dead in California!" exclaimed Nat.

"True enough," rejoined Sam, "the real one is. But this Gooddale is a spurious one. It is time now that I should tell you what I have been meaning to since we set out on our trip. As you know, I came from the South Sea Islands some years ago. I never told the reason—it was this: When my father, Elias Gooddale, emigrated to these islands from Australia I was only a little fellow.

"But to return to the schooner," he broke off. "This Gooddale, as he calls himself, instantly recognized me and began a long rigmarole about some sapphires. It seems, to make a long story short, that he and Morello whom he met years ago in Mexico had come to some sort of agreement to divide some sapphires. I told them I knew nothing about them." (This was true. While conversant with the main object of the trip, Sam had not been told of the sapphire hoard.) "I

also told Gooddale that I wished nothing to say to him; that I knew him to be a scoundrel. I would have said more, but just then that fellow Dayton struck in.

“ ‘Head him up in a keg and chuck him overboard,’ he said. ‘The fellow is in the way on board and likely to prove a source of trouble if we don’t look out.’

“They seemed to hesitate a while and then consulted together. The upshot of it was that I was to be placed in that barrel with some biscuit and water. Holes were pierced in the top and Morrello told me I ought to be lucky to get such a chance for my life.

“Then they placed me in the thing, lowered me overside, and set me adrift. I was desperate at first, as you may imagine. But afterward I cooled down and set to work trying to figure out some way out of my scrape. The better to keep up my spirits, I started to sing. A good thing I did, too, or you’d have missed me sure.”

“Then you are the son of the real Elias Gooddale?” asked Nat wonderingly, after a pause.

"I am, and I have in my chest the papers to prove it. But I never would take such steps but for the black treachery of my uncle—my mother's brother—for such is the relationship of the false Elias Gooddale to me. His right name is Jonas Meecham. Well, as I said, when we came out here I was only a little fellow. Father took up land on Ohdahmi and soon had a flourishing business on his hands.

"Then one day Jonas Meecham arrived. From what I have been able to gather, father had some secret on his conscience which Jonas Meecham also knew. At any rate, from what I saw as I grew older, I know that Meecham bled him for money constantly.

"Not long after I made this discovery poor mother died. I was then in a terrible position for a youngster, for father was moody and melancholy and Jonas was cruel and crafty and hated me. One day, it was after a trading schooner had called at the islands, father was missing. He left a letter for me, telling me that he had left the island forever, leaving all he had

to Jonas and expressing the hope that he would never prosper.

"He had gone to seek a new fortune in California, he said. Well, after he left, Meecham, to avoid complications I suppose, assumed the name of Elias Gooddale. He was brutal and cruel to me, and one night I stowed away on a co-coanut schooner and escaped. I drifted about the islands for some time, learning much of sailing and boat building. But all the time my goal was California. I longed to find my father. In the meantime, I assumed the name of Hinckley, for, since my uncle took it, my own was hateful to me.

"By the merest chance, as you know, I entered the service of Captain Akers. In that way I learned from you that you knew positively of the death of my father."

"And also that he found the fortune for which he was seeking, but found it too late to do him any good," struck in Nat. "Give me your hand, Sam. If things work out right, you will be a wealthy man."

"Why—what?" stammered Sam, astonished at the lad's enthusiasm.

"I mean what I say," went on Nat, who had not previously told Sam any of the details of their adventures. "We have, by an extraordinary coincidence, been holding in trust for you a fortune."

"A fortune? Where is it?" gasped Sam.

"In the hands of Morello, and——"

"Stand by!" roared Captain Akers. "Here she comes!"

So engrossed had they all been in Sam's narrative that they had not paid any attention to the threatened storm. But now "here she came," as the captain put it, with a vengeance.

A white wall of water rolled toward the boat. It did not seem as if she could live for an instant.

"Head her up into it!" roared Captain Akers sturdily.

His order was obeyed and the boat, overloaded as she was, rode the waves bravely, although she shipped considerable water. Following the first billow, the waves, though high, were not so

menacing. But it was without a doubt only a question of time before the boat must be overwhelmed.

"Look!" shouted Nat suddenly. "There's a small bay around that point yonder. Pull for that!"

"Right, my lad. If we're not swamped before we reach it, we can beach her there in safety," decided the captain.

The boat was headed for the bay. On and on she drove, the waves raising her heavenward one minute and the next instant dropping her into a dark abyss of their troughs.

"Hurrray! We're almost there!" shouted Nat gleefully as they neared the beach. But there is many a slip 'twixt cup and lip. Hardly had the words left his lips before a mighty wave bore down on the overladen boat. Caught in the avalanche of green water, she sank like a stone. The next instant her occupants were struggling in the surf.

Nat struck out for shore, but before he reached it his strength, already sapped by the adventures

of the night and morning, gave out altogether. But just as the undertow caught him and he was being dragged back into the boiling vortex of surf, a strong hand seized him and dragged him to safety.

"Thanks, Sam," choked out the half-drowned boy, recognizing his rescuer. "You saved my life."

"And if all goes well, you have saved me a fortune," retorted Sam briskly. "Some time when we have an opportunity I wish you would tell me the full story of my father's death."

Nat promised. He was glad to see, as he stood on the beach, that all of the party had landed in safely, although they presented a bedraggled, miserable appearance.

Luckily Cal, like a seasoned mountaineer, carried some matches in a waterproof case. He produced these and, collecting driftwood, they soon had a roaring blaze going in the shelter of a cliff and were standing about it drying themselves. It was then that Sam heard from Nat's lips the full narrative of the sapphire find and the

strange adventures that had followed thick and fast. Hardly had he concluded before, round the point, there came driving through the storm a craft which they all recognized with a shout as the "Nettie Nelsen."

On she came, fleeing before the storm like some frightened creature.

"My stars!" shouted Captain Akers, as he gazed. "If they don't put their helm up, they'll be on the rocks in another minute!"

"That's right," cried Nat, "but look," he went on, "no wonder they can't handle her. Her mainmast is gone."

"So it is, lad. Gone by the board."

"She's driving straight for those rocks!" cried Cal, indicating a line of low-lying rocks which ran out seaward from the point. The spray was breaking over them in wind-driven clouds. Through the whiteness their black points could be seen sticking up like fangs.

In another moment the schooner was among them. A terrible, rasping, grinding sound ensued as she pounded on the rocky surfaces. A

sharp chill ran through the boys as they gazed. In that sea, and in her position, it would have been evident to the veriest landsman that she could not live more than a short time. Even as they gazed the foremast snapped off short and went overside with a terrific crash. Worse still, some figures, which had been clinging to it, vanished with it.

"If we could only help them," breathed Nat. "It is terrible to watch such a scene helplessly."

"Yet we can do nothing," said Captain Akers. "But, look! it is the beginning of the end!"

As he spoke a big gap could be seen to open in the side of the unfortunate schooner. The waves broke over her in clouds and her bowsprit snapped off, dragged by the weight of the foremast, with the report of a gun.

All at once the watchers saw two figures emerge from below and appear on the stern. It was at once evident that they were struggling.

"It's Dayton and Morello!" exclaimed Nat.

"So it is," cried Joe. "Look, Morello is seiz-

ing something from Dayton and shoving it into his pockets. He's got on a life-belt—oh!"

The exclamation was called forth by something that had just occurred. The figure Nat had recognized as Morello had been seen suddenly to draw a pistol. The next second there was a flash and a puff of smoke. No report could be heard above the fury of the storm, but they saw Dayton throw up his hands and topple backward.

As he did so Morello, without a backward glance, leaped to the stern rail, and without an instant's hesitation jumped overboard from the fast-breaking craft.

"He'll be drowned!" cried Joe.

"No, he won't," rejoined Nat. "I saw him put on a life-belt before he jumped."

Breathlessly they watched Morello as he neared the shore. One minute he would vanish altogether, but the next he reappeared, and steadily forged ahead. In the haste and desperation with which he had left the schooner, he had not noticed the party on shore. But as he drew closer he suddenly saw them. Had they been a party of

ghosts he could not have been more panic-stricken. With a loud cry that was instantly choked by the water, he threw his arms above his head.

As he did so he sank. But the waves caught him and rolled him toward the shore.

"We must get him out or he'll be killed," cried Nat, as time and again the struggling man was drawn back by the undertow.

"How can we?" gasped Cal. "If only I had a lariat here, I'd——"

"We can do better than that," said Nat hopefully.

"How?"

"Form a human chain. Captain Akers, you are the heaviest. You will form the anchor. Now then you take hold of Cal and Cal will grip Dingdong and he in turn will hold Joe, who will grasp me."

Before they could remonstrate against his daring plan, Nat had them all lined up under his directions, and then, while Joe held him tightly, the brave lad plunged into the surf.

As Morello came within reach he seized him, only to find him instantly torn from his grasp. But the next time the leader of the outlaws came within reach Nat did better. He caught and gripped him tightly.

"Heave!" he shouted back to the others.

With a rush Nat and the man he had saved were pulled out of the surf by the living chain and landed high and dry on the beach. Morello's senses had left him and his cheeks were a dead white under their swarthy hue. He gasped like a fish that has just been landed.

Nat knelt by him and began applying "first aid" measures. While doing so he noticed that the man's body was extraordinarily lumpy. The next instant he discovered why. Morello's pockets were filled with the sapphires. It was a wonder he had not sunk like a stone when he jumped. The cause of the fight between himself and Dayton was explained now. Doubtless the other had tried to prevent his leader escaping with the loot.

Without compunction on the Motor Rangers' parts, the outlaw leader's pockets were rifled. Of

course, not all the stones were there, but the finest lay exposed to view on the sand when the task was done. Sam Hinckley—or Sam Gooddale, as we must call him now—looked on with eyes that fairly bulged.

"And just to think," he exclaimed, "that my poor dad found all that."

"It is tough to think that he found it too late to make use of it," agreed Joe.

Just then Morello opened his eyes. He sat up with a start and a wild shout:

"Get the wheel over, you lubbers! Head her about, I say! I——"

He broke off short and looked about him with a terrible look of rage as he realized all at once where he was and what had happened. Suddenly his eyes fell on the sapphires. With a yell, he dashed for them. But Cal's strong hand jerked him away.

"Go easy, colonel," he said. "You've had a lot of rope, but you've reached the end of it now. And, moreover—— Ah! you would—would you!"

The colonel had drawn a knife, and, but for Cal's quick blow on the wrist, which sent it spinning into the spume, he would have plunged it into the mountaineer.

"After that we'd better tie him," said Captain Akers. "Joe, my boy, will you cut some of those creepers I see growing up yonder? They'll make nice bracelets and ankle ornaments for this gentleman."

Morello growled, more like a trapped wild beast than a human being, and then, after being bound, sank into apathy by the fire. It was not till some days later that they learned from him that when the schooner had been dismasted some of the crew had made off in a boat, among them being the false Elias Gooddale. It may be said here that the boat was never heard of again, and doubtless sunk in the hurricane, although it may have reached some remote island.

What with shell fish on the rocks, and cocoanuts and bananas inland, our castaways were in no danger of starving. But they passed a restless night, nevertheless. As for Morello, his

bound form sat huddled by the fire, gazing unblinkingly—like a captured wild cat—into its depths. Of what was he thinking? Of his mis-spent life? Perhaps.

At dawn, when the tempest had died out, Nat, who was on watch, gave a great shout. The others instantly awakened and saw the most glorious sight they could have thought of at that instant.

The "Nomad" was moving swiftly into the bay. Behind her came a "trig and trim" looking black gunboat. At her stern flew the tricolor of France. As she anchored a puff of smoke rolled from her side and a loud report went echoing against the cliffs. Evidently the gunboat's commander meant to show the natives he meant business. By and by a boat was dropped and, manned with sailors, left the gunboat's side. It stopped at the "Nomad" for an instant to take on the sturdy form of Captain Nelsen.

Ten minutes later the adventurers were reunited. Captain Nelsen found it hard to control

his emotion when he learned of the loss of his schooner, of which no trace remained at daylight. He did so manfully, however, and listened to the boys' strange stories. Another interested auditor was Captain De Lesseps of the gunboat "Tricolor."

After missing Sam, Captain Nelsen had been about to put back after him. But the storm struck him and he was blown seaward, despite the powerful engines of the "Nomad." Shortly before dawn the French gunboat had seen his signals of distress—blue Coston lights—and borne down on him. When the gale moderated the two vessels had left in company for the island, the captain in the meantime having told his story to Captain De Lesseps.

No time was lost in sending landing parties of marines after the savages and the leaders of the raid were captured and doomed to exile on another island. The wounded man who had helped the boys escape was also found and set at liberty. This done, Morello, against whom the boys

lodged charges, was placed on board the "Tri-color," in irons in the brig, and taken to Nukahiva, till it could be arranged to have him extradited. Among other charges, that of the murder of Ed. Dayton, who was never seen again, was placed against him.

Sam, in due time, proved his right to the sapphires, which had led to such an eventful cruise on blue water. One of the first things noticeable after Sam had acquired his wealth was that he visited many shipyards, inquiring for the smartest schooner obtainable. The upshot of it was that Captain Nelsen now has a new "Nettie Nelsen," fitted with auxiliary gasoline engines. She is the smartest craft of her size in the coast trade, and the captain is on the road to fortune.

As for the Motor Rangers, the exigencies of space compel us to bid them farewell, for the time being, at this point. But other adventures—in a new field—are in store for them, to the full as exciting as any through which they have yet passed. What these were and how our lads bore

themselves in the trying and often perilous circumstances that lay ahead of them will all be told in detail in the next volume of this series—"The Motor Rangers' Cloud Cruiser."

THE END.

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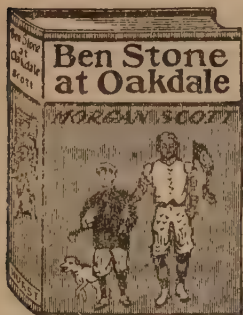
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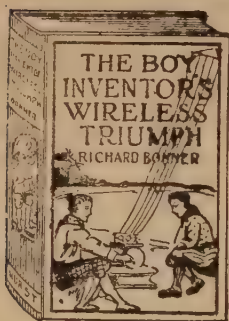
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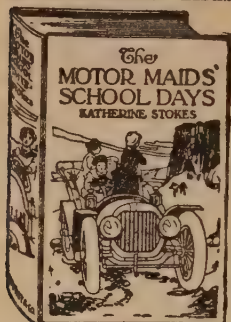
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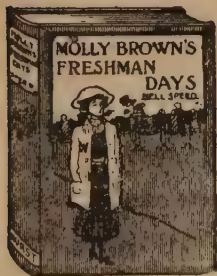
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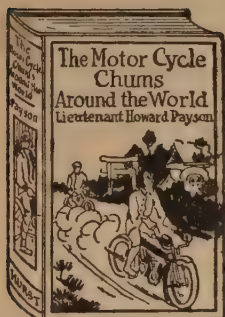
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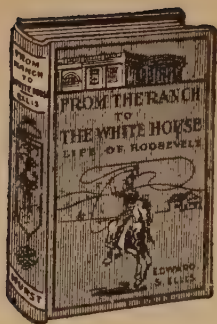
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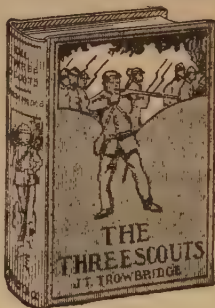
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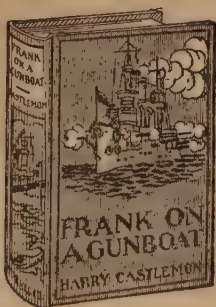
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